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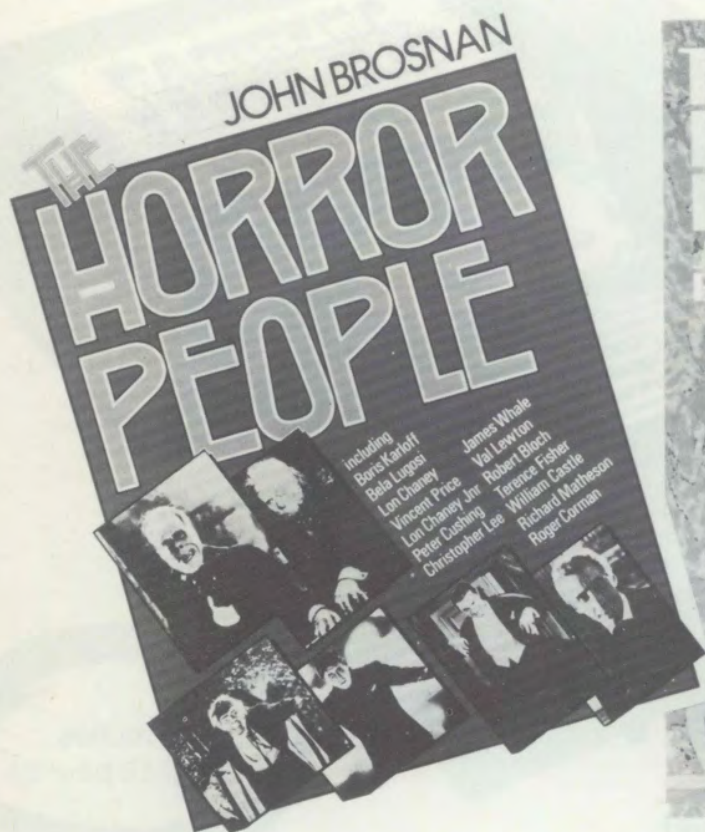
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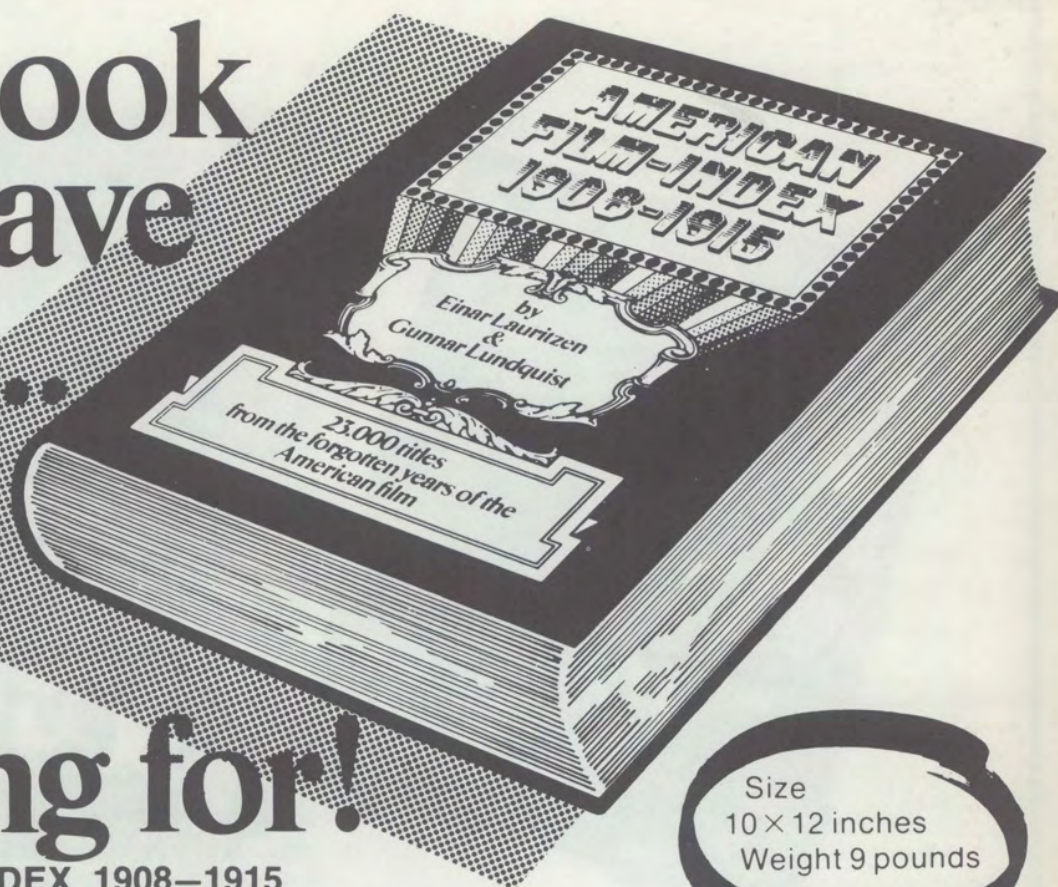
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A Safe Place
(Jaglom 1971)
Right
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WINTER 1976/77

Volume 46 No. 1

SIGHT AND SOUND

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*On the Cover: Liza Minnelli in
Martin Scorsese's 'New York, New York'*

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official British Film Institute policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.

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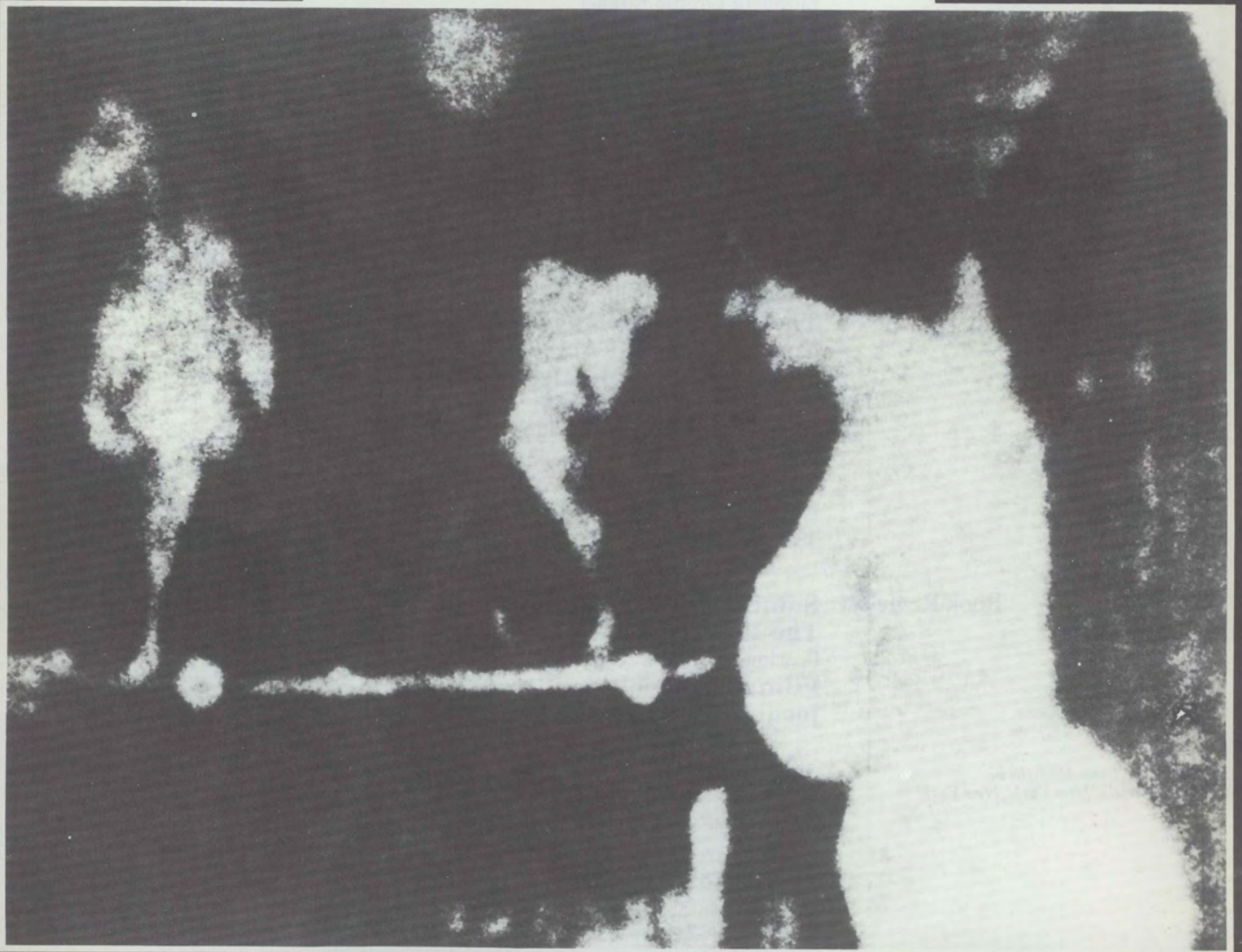
REGROUPING:

'Tom, Tom the Piper's Son', in which Ken Jacobs analyses a 10-minute film made in 1905 (probably by Billy Bitzer) 'to begin to show how much was there'. Right and above: a scene from the original. Below: enlargement of a detail.



REFLECTIONS
ON THE
EDINBURGH
FESTIVAL
1976

JONATHAN
ROSENBAUM



PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE CINEMA EVENT: In her introductory comments at the opening session, Claire Johnston notes that 'a theory of the components of British film culture hasn't yet been developed,' and an American critic sitting beside me scribbles a furious note: 'I thought this was supposed to be an international conference.'

I sympathise with both positions. Why, after all, does one hear so much talk today about 'British film culture' when no one ever seems to speak about French or American 'film culture' as such? Could it be because the former doesn't even exist yet in theory? At best, there's a set of working hypotheses, which the Edinburgh Festival—like no other event in the U.K.—contrives to bring together. And inevitably some of these tend to come out a bit half-cocked and cross-eyed. France, after all, already had a sophisticated 'film culture' of sorts half a century ago. Here, in 1976, one is confronted with a good deal of advanced and ambitious theoretical work (particularly in *Screen* and *Afterimage*) and a pitifully small amount of practical and historical understanding: two heroic steps forward on one level, three myopic steps backward on another.

OUTSIDE THE EVENT, *Le Nosferat*: adaptation of a 1973 theatre piece, first feature by Belgian director Maurice Rabinowicz. Everyone complains about its slowness, which for me is part of its sinuous charm. The camera prowls around chipped and peeling ruins; an asthmatic accordion plays; an expressionless woman scatters flowers. At some point, after a Madonna exposes her leg and lights up a cigarette, another woman sings a bitter-sweet Brechtian song about eight little whores ('I am number four'). A mainly non-narrative film about Jack the Ripper and his stodgy bourgeois family, with speeches largely drawn from Nazi figures; fabulous and funny work done with the actors, strange electronic punctuations on the soundtrack, ritualistic actions endlessly protracted like pedal points... how can I talk about such pleasures coherently in a country that still hasn't discovered Werner Schroeter, and contents itself with meagre substitutes like *La Paloma*? Or narcissistic platitudes like *Tenderness of the Wolves* in place of *Le Nosferat*? The cultural background needed to support such a film exists in France; here it isn't even present in theory—nor, one suspects, will it ever be. And modest delights like this one, rejected by 'avant-garde' and 'dominant' factions alike, will disappear without trace, another drop in the bottomless bucket of the undefined.

It is important to remember that, starting with Delluc, French film theory grew directly out of confrontations with contemporary works; and starting with Kuleshov and Eisenstein, Soviet film theory grew directly out of a revolutionary social practice. English film theory, in so far as it exists at all, tends to get by on neither, generally attempting a fusion of borrowed elements. This week, it's Lacan and Metz; last year at Edinburgh, it was Brecht; and Freud, Marx, Althusser, Kristeva, Derrida, Barthes and the Russian formalists comprise essential parts of the background.

One could criticise this pantheon by saying that it relates to 'culture', not merely 'film culture', and with so much theoretical space to be covered while following these writers (apart from Metz) on non-filmic subjects, cinema itself might turn out to be the neglected wallflower in the debate. And one could be confident about this criticism, were it not for the publication, over the past couple of years, of Stephen Heath's 'Lessons from Brecht' and 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis', Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure

and Narrative Cinema' and Paul Willemsen's 'Reflections on Eikhenbaum's Concept of Internal Speech in the Cinema' in *Screen*, and Noël Burch and Jorge Dana's 'Propositions' in *Afterimage*—to cite only a few obvious touchstones. Each of these articles, whatever else one might say about it, conveys substantial things about films, concretely as well as theoretically, and none of them would have been possible without a study of some of the figures in the 'pantheon' listed above.

Which is not to say that obstacles don't exist—particularly for an American like myself who wasn't introduced to serious criticism through an awareness of theory, and who tends to regard such notions as 'collective work' as a recipe for conformity more often than creativity. The use of language that many sceptics cite is also a problem—not when it comes to such things as Lacanian terminology (for how could one understand Lacan properly without it?), but rather in the clotted coinages that tend to rise to the surface within such contexts. A few of the ugliest encountered in Edinburgh would include 'complexify', 'hierarchising', 'unusuality', 'narrativisation' (although this, at least, doesn't appear to have an obvious synonym), and, worst of all, 'content-ist' (as opposed to 'formalist')—a hideous term for an archaic concept.

At the same time, it would be foolish to try to discredit an entire intellectual movement on the basis of a few individuals who represent it ungracefully—a ploy that is often used. One could argue, too, that some of Stephen Heath's wordplay justifies comparable stylistic risks by expanding the possibilities of the language at his disposal; as a co-translator of sections of *Finnegans Wake* into French, he has at least trained in the right school. But not every foray in this direction comes armed with an adequate grasp of style; and an obligatory reading of Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language' by most of the *Screen* writers might conceivably have a salutary effect.

The notion of language, moreover, is basic to the concerns of this Event. Lacan's reading of Freud is based on the assumption that the structure of the unconscious is the structure of language—a reasonable enough premise if one concedes that, as Jan Miel puts it, 'all the material available to the analyst is verbal: what is analysed in the psychoanalytic interview is not the patient's dreams, but the patient's report of his dreams.' Combine Freud's theory of the

unconscious with the theoretical practice of structural linguistics and you arrive at Lacan's starting point.

And what has this to do with cinema? Enter Christian Metz, a film theorist concerned with semiology whose second book (in 1971) was entitled *Language and Cinema* and who has described his work more recently as a 'meta-psychology' of the film spectator. If films can only be perceived through individual readings of them, one has to examine the process of the reading—how the viewer 'constructs' a film at the same time that the film 'constructs' the conditions of its viewing. And if a child similarly encounters 'language' and assumes an identity at the same time—whether it's at the point of being named (a social definition) or at the stage of recognising himself/herself in a mirror (a psychological definition, which Lacan calls 'the mirror phase')—the process is theoretically a comparable one, as long as one acknowledges the relationships between films, labels and mirrors. Thus 'Psychoanalysis and Cinema' doesn't mean a psychoanalysis of cinema (an absurd notion, because Freud's theory of the unconscious refers only to people, not to artifacts); it means, rather, a study of the structures within which film language operates—how films produce (or deny) certain meanings. Within such a discussion, one can no longer speak of form or content as static, pre-given values; it is the manner in which each produces the other that one attempts to describe.

'Attempts' is the operative word, and the various papers and discussions of the week succeed or fail on diverse levels in so far as certain moments illuminate or obscure the issues for separate individuals.* Speaking for myself, it is impossible to learn anything practical from this experience unless one is willing to wrestle with it on one's own terms. 'Accepting' an inert slab of dogma is out of the question, because everyone involved in the debates is coming at the material from a different angle. There are no 'experts' around to mimic: some theorists know little about cinema, some film critics know little about theory, and some of the psychologists and psychotherapists present know relatively little about cinema or theory. And within this Tower of Babel, language (whether it's the language of the conference or the language of cinema) remains the central issue, even if the cacophony of different tongues occasionally—and paradoxically—clouds this issue most of all.

OUTSIDE: I'm not sure whether I 'like' Lizzie Borden's *Re-Grouping*, but I'm less sure whether this matters; it isn't a film that asks to be liked. An American film that by its own account began as a collective work and then became a 'personal' one as Borden proceeded to take it over, it clearly *isn't* liked

* I won't try to explain the other specific Lacanian concepts—primary and secondary repression, castration complex, etc.—that Rosalind Coward takes up in her introductory essay in the *Edinburgh '76 Magazine* (which also contains most of the other papers in the Event, along with an essay by Kristeva, Wollen's 'The Two Avant-Gardes' and useful bibliographies). Unlike Robin Wood in the *Times Educational Supplement*, I don't feel that this piece presupposes a thorough knowledge of both psychoanalytical and semiological concepts and terminology, tools which I flagrantly lack. Despite a few foggy passages, it still manages to outline difficult material with some clarity.

by some of the women who are seen and heard in it. Before the screening, a New York critic publicly conveys no less than nine charges against the film made by one of these women. Foremost among the objections are that Borden received no clearance from any of the people involved, misrepresented the women's group that the film is 'about', and made a work that is 'sexist' and 'reactionary'.

Assuming that one could reach any conclusions about the women's group 'represented' in the film, the latter charge might conceivably be justifiable. The fact of the matter is that I can't—which is precisely what makes it so fascinating on a theoretical level. Throughout *Re-Grouping*, one hears off-screen female voices repeatedly and repetitively criticising the 'film' that Borden has made; because this 'film' evidently precedes and therefore excludes these criticisms, it

On the other hand, who's to say that the most useful dividends of the Event have to occur within its own auspices? Conversations over meals or drinks, when the participants are free to pursue their own 're-groupings', often prove more stimulating than the seminars, and a similar contradiction applies to most of the films screened within the Event. Excepting only *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* and *Jeanne Dielman*, the choice is strictly Hollywood-auteurist: *Sylvia Scarlett*, *Morocco*, *The Pirate*, *The Cobweb*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *North by Northwest*, *The Birds*. And for a variety of reasons, the amount of direct enlightenment about these films that emerges seems to be fairly minimal.

One contributing factor is the sheer timidity displayed by most of the papers in encountering films directly; there usually turn out to be at least one or two supportive



The camera and the window. Michael Snow (at window) films 'Back and Forth'

clearly *isn't* the same film that one is watching and listening to. Analogous displacements inform the discourse at other levels: there is a lot of talk about a woman named Susan who died while the film (or 'film') was being made, and one realises that she is visible elsewhere, but there is no way one can match up these strains of information to identify her. As film and spectator proceed maddeningly through fade-outs to white, overlapping voices which move in and out of synch with the visuals, jump cuts and other distancing devices, one gradually realises that Borden's title refers not only to the social patterning that forms the film's ostensible (and elusive) subject, but also to its own manner of presentation. Dissolving 'form' and 'content' into an impenetrable labyrinth of cross-references to an ungraspable subject, a perpetual 'work-in-progress' on the spectator that is never resolved or completed, this diabolical hour of film foregrounds the concerns of the Psychoanalysis Event in a way that Hollywood movies clearly cannot—by referring directly to its own productions and suppressions of meaning. But it never gets mentioned at any of the morning sessions.

texts standing in between the analyst and the screen. Correspondingly, the missing references are mainly to films rather than to verbal texts; apart from Stephen Heath, none of the scheduled participants seems comfortable in making these two realms of discourse coextensive within the terms of an argument. Characteristically, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's presentation leads off with an excellent summary of Metz's development, but when he finally makes the leap from Metz to Minnelli, the effect is that of an abrupt plunge. The dance sequences in *The Pirate*, one learns, are points in the film that allow for the libidinal enactment of fantasies. Beneath the main fiction—'the story of a woman learning how to love'—is the fantasy of being a pirate, a fiction stated by the film itself rather than by any character. One can nod one's head dully at this, but the overall impression is that the trip has hardly seemed necessary; to all intents and purposes, the exercise has reverted to an old-fashioned 'content' analysis, and due to a shortage of time, *The Cobweb* never gets mentioned at all.

But a lot of interesting raw material gets set down for inspection and future reassess-



Katharine Hepburn in 'Sylvia Scarlett': 'meanings of masculinity and femininity'

ment during the course of the week, and problems that arise in the papers can be questioned, pursued and clarified in subsequent discussions—creating a dialectical chain of ideas that is itself instructive, in so far as it foregrounds the manner in which one's own understandings get produced. Here again one can speak of certain insights arising independently of the formal meetings: the manner in which the camera pulling back from Gene Kelly at the start of the last scene in *The Pirate* converts an address to the spectator into an address to spectators in the film, occasioning a curious sense of ease regained; the ways that the 'meanings' of masculinity and femininity are generated through costume and behaviour in Katharine Hepburn's brilliant performance as *Sylvia Scarlett*. But the difference between these insights is significant: the first refers to film language, while the second could theoretically apply just as well to the 'language' of theatre. (Which is not to give Minnelli any points over Cukor; on the contrary, the latter film's ambiguities and displacements seem considerably richer.)

OUTSIDE: The initial response provoked by festival films such as *Cannonball*, *Nashville Girl* and *Hollywood Boulevard* is: why? I know that Edinburgh has formerly declared itself 'committed' to such commodities as Paul Bartel and New World Pictures, but I can't quite understand that either, at least as a general principle. If Edinburgh needs a few reliable crowd-pleasers, it can surely do better than this . . . Second thoughts suggest the real function of these screenings for the participants in the Event who attend them: simple relaxation. Which might seem fine in theory (or practice), but from the vantage point of the Event is more debatable. If one 'relaxes' from a decision to look at films more carefully by essentially junking this position—turning off a battery of mental operations that the Event is supposed to animate—the whole point becomes a bit muddled.

The idea that the Event is 'school' and that these screenings are an excuse for playing hookey is implicitly encouraged by the daily schedules, and it is hard to imagine a better way of undermining the festival's ambitions—unless those ambitions are merely to expose existing contradictions. If Edinburgh fulfilled its radical scenario more completely, one would experience work and play all the time—more fun at the morning sessions and less of a sense of 'slumming' in the evenings. But as things stand, the fusions of theory and practice tend to be more accidental than inevitable.

Nevertheless, one has to start somewhere. And each day of the Event starts as follows: presentation of a paper, discussion, coffee break, then meetings with smaller 'study groups'; after lunch are screenings which relate to the next day's paper. It is requested that participants stay in their assigned study groups and not switch to other ones—a rule that I decide to disobey halfway through the week, with few subsequent regrets. My reason for doing so is a wholly subjective feeling of censorship within my first group (although interestingly enough, a Canadian feminist felt the same way about the group that I move into, and has switched herself). Basically this is a matter of group dynamics: despite the presence of articulate spokesmen for avant-garde positions in both groups, it seems that these positions are being generally understood and successfully applied only in the second.

I decide to leave the first after it is collectively decided that the two screenings to be held that afternoon, preceding Stephen Heath's paper—*Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*—offer too wide a range for a concrete discussion, and consequently the group will limit its focus to the latter film. Practically speaking, when the only unequivocal avant-garde film in the Event can be ruled out of order before it's even seen—a procedure which closely parallels the operations of 'British film culture' at present—I'd rather seek my edification elsewhere.

Perhaps the most significant 'intervention' made during the week was the showing of Ken Jacobs' seven-year-old *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, if only because of the public response it elicited. Having already seen the film, I stayed away, thereby missing what many observers later described as something close to a riot: spectators who rushed out of the cinema after only a few moments, complaining of headaches; others who stayed and insisted on making a lot of noise. What provoked this hysteria? Jacobs' silent film, 86 minutes long, begins and ends with the straight presentation of a 10-minute film of the same title, made in 1905 (most likely by Griffith's cameraman Billy Bitzer)—a comic illustration of the nursery rhyme recorded in eight tableaux by a static camera, basically depicting the chase of a dozen or so people after Tom and the pig that he steals in the opening shot. The remainder of Jacobs' film proceeds to perform an elaborate analysis of this material by rephotographing it on a screen and examining it with all the filmic means at his disposal: slow, fast, reverse and stop-motion, cropping, camera movement, masking, 'flicker' effects, wipes, superimpositions and other devices.

A fascinating work of film criticism composed in the language of the medium—and one that incidentally charts over sixty years of that medium's visual history—it is aptly described by Jacobs as a 'didactic' film that seeks to 'begin to show how much was there' in the original work. And indeed, when the latter is finally repeated as coda, the effects of Jacobs' analysis are vividly demonstrated: a charming period piece has been transformed into a work of remarkable density.

Yet apparently the film's silence, the abstraction of process and detail, the 'deconstruction' and reassembly of narrative and illusionist artifice—combined with some of the 'flicker' effects—suffice to make its experience intolerable to most participants in the Event. Having long regarded *Tom, Tom* as one of the most pleasurable and directly accessible of all the 'structural' films, I must confess that I remain as shocked and baffled by this rejection as others were shocked and/or baffled by the film. If the only screening within the context of the Event that made filmic operations legible rather than invisible was enough to confound aficionados of Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida—not to mention several Godard enthusiasts—the pioneering work that remains to be done in even conceiving of a 'British film culture' must be awesome indeed.

... It was somewhat bewildering to read about the Psychoanalysis Event afterwards in the national press, where one learned that 'the "pleasure principle" is strictly outlawed from critical practice' and that 'semilogist critics' are apparently reluctant to smile; off-putting, in any case, to be told that one hadn't been having fun after all. These and comparable notions invariably came from critics who contented themselves with the *Edinburgh '76 Magazine* and stayed away from the Event, making it possible to imagine anything. Yet by the week's end, at an uninhibited private party attended by what seemed to be a majority of the Event's alumnae, it was possible to look back on the proceedings in a much more favourable light. As the week's tensions dissolved into cheerful and friendly abandon, it eventually became clear that the Event's frustrations and contradictions had been no less instruc-

tive than the more obvious achievements. Putting it all together would take some time; for the moment, it was enough to know that certain essential problems had been aired and recognised.

2

For more reasons than one, the 'International Forum on Avant-Garde Film' was the portion of the festival that I was particularly looking forward to. The avoidance of this branch of cinema by most of my colleagues has helped to keep a lot of key work unavailable in the U.K., and I welcomed the chance to catch up with recent films by Snow, Godard, Rainer and others. Equally intriguing was the focus of this Event as originally advertised—screenings and debates centred on Peter Wollen's 'The Two Avant-Gardes', a polemical article in *Studio International* (November-December 1975) seeking to chart out some terms of a possible *rapprochement* between 'two distinct avant-gardes' which currently exist in European film: 'The first can be loosely identified with the Co-op movement. The second would include filmmakers such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, Hanoun, Jancsó.' A meaty essay, it offered a useful launching pad precisely because it summed up so many aspects of recent thinking in England about the avant-garde.

The ambition to stage an encounter between factions which '[at] the extreme ... would tend to deny the [other] the status of the avant-garde at all' seemed wholly admirable; and the fact that Wollen was chiefly responsible for the introduction of avant-garde in Edinburgh last year—combined with the intelligence that informs much of his writing—made him the ideal person to broach this controversial topic. On the other hand, the more negative side of Wollen's influence was also worth discussing. Eight years ago, his 'Notes towards a Structural Analysis of the Films of Samuel Fuller', published in the first issue of *Cinema*, spawned a series of related auteurist studies—basically old-fashioned thematic analyses of Hollywood films, made more respectable by certain up-to-date methodological trimmings—which established a trend in English film criticism leading away from a close study of film texts (as promoted by *Movie*)

Kuleshov's 'The Great Consoler': the shopgirl shoots her protector



and towards a greater emphasis on theoretical models. An unfortunate side-effect of this tendency—compounded by the conformity of Wollen's less imaginative disciples—was a narrowness of reference points that initially skirted the avant-garde entirely, catapulted such neglected figures as Fuller, Sirk and Tashlin into central positions, and meanwhile excluded so many interesting film-makers from any kind of consideration that the options of an intellectual 'film culture' in England finally seemed to rest on a rather limited and specialised pantheon.

To some degree, Wollen himself has kept ahead of these developments; in other respects his work still reflects them. The potential pluralism implied by 'The Two Avant-Gardes' is largely cut short at the roots by a reliance on oracular assertion rather than demonstration. The inclusion of Hanoun and Jancsó is never explained or defended, while the allegedly radical practice of Godard in *Le Gai Savoir*—the only film discussed at length—is consistently taken for granted. We're told that 'Godard tries programmatically to "return to zero", to de-compose and then re-compose sounds and images,' that 'the film deliberately suspends "meaning", avoids any teleology or finality, in the interests of a destruction and re-assembly, a re-combination of the order of the sign as an experiment in the dissolution of old meanings and the generation of new ones from the semiotic process itself.' Yet Wollen never clarifies by citing any specific decomposition, re-composition, suspension, destruction, re-assembly, re-combination, dissolution or generation, attempted or otherwise.* A speech describing Godard's aspirations, quoted from the script—a prime instance of the intentional fallacy—is used to blanket over the lack of any concrete analysis; and one is left with an idealist gloss that asks and evidently expects to be taken on blind faith alone.

It was my hope, in any case, that such issues and related ones could have been raised at an Event structured round Wollen's paper. But although no change in policy is announced, and the essay is reprinted without alteration in the *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, the actual Event—organised by Wollen and Simon Field, the editor of *Afterimage*—proves to be quite different. The topics consist of 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde', 'The Soviet Avant-Garde of the 20s', 'The Avant-Garde and Language', 'The Avant-Garde and Politics' and 'The Avant-Garde and Narrative'. And the major emphasis is on North American avant-garde (which, according to the essay, is restricted to the Co-op movement), with Americans playing nearly as dominant a role as the English played last week.

This, to be sure, has rewards and advantages of its own. But the strategic retreat implied by this manoeuvre still has ramifications, not least of which is a definition of avant-garde that is essentially traditional and

'social' rather than polemical. (Correspondingly, most of the films on view are relatively familiar and predictable—a policy important for laying a certain groundwork, perhaps, but hardly committed to offering or postulating any independent discoveries.) And the ghost of Wollen's original proposal hovers over many of the proceedings, occasionally taking unexpected and illuminating shapes.

The most informative of the morning sessions I attend is devoted to 'Soviet Avant-Garde of the 20s', with Annette Michelson offering a condensed preview of her introduction to Eisenstein's diary entries on his project to 'film' *Kapital* (a dream that was fed, interestingly, by his fascination with *Ulysses*) in *October* No. 2, and Ben Brewster relating Russian films of that period to all the other topics of the Event, largely through the context of a capsule history of the Russian formalist magazine *Lef*. And on all counts, the most exciting film I see in Edinburgh is Kuleshov's *The Great Consoler* (1933), which leads off the Event and, in its own way, relates to all the morning topics as well. Dealing with William Sydney Porter (O. Henry) during his term in an Ohio penitentiary, the film shuttles brilliantly between his relations with one of his own characters (a safecracker and fellow prisoner), a story he writes glamorising the latter's exploits, and the effect of this story on a shopgirl—a relay made all the more unpredictable by the fact that Kuleshov begins with the shopgirl. Addressing not only the issues of narrative continuity and displacement but also the political question of the artist as the 'great consoler' (Porter's story makes the safecracker less rebellious, but is ultimately rejected by the shopgirl, who rebels against her own repressed situation and shoots her protector), and the relationship between different kinds of film discourse (intertitles are used in addition to narrative and dialogue, and some are complicated further by drawings which complement the texts), it is no less remarkable for its visual style and its uses of sound.

All festivals are conventions in disguise, and a central part of their value is in the casual exchanges that become possible. This is especially apparent during the second week, when the separate parts of the Event fail to cohere in any satisfactory manner. Michael Snow treats me to a cordial and persuasive critique of all the things he found 'peculiar' about my account of his *Rameau's Nephew*... at last year's festival—explaining, for instance, that unlike many of his other works, this film isn't really 'about' its specific techniques but about the experiences that derive from them, so that it isn't necessary to understand the procedures precisely... An anecdote recounted elsewhere—about an intriguing group of silent films made by Navajo Indians, shown one afternoon for the session on 'language'—also sticks in the mind. Apparently one of the Navajos made two films, one for his tribesmen and the other for 'outsiders'; when the second was shown to his tribe, it was reported that they couldn't understand it because it was in English.

Snow's latest short, *Breakfast*, focuses on an array of unused food and dishes on a table while one hears the sounds of a radio and dishwashing. A series of odd little events

slowly disrupts the complacent stasis of this quaint corner of domesticity: a cup wobbles; eggs roll; the tablecloth moves; a juice carton spills; a plate tilts upward and stands eerily on edge; the carton turns upright again... The solution to this magic comes at the end, when the camera pulls back along the table's surface to reveal tracking rails, and the title *Breakfast (Table-Top Dolly)* appears over the image. It turns out that the camera itself, fronted by a sheet of see-through plastic, has been performing all this monkey business. The juxtaposition of 'before' (groceries and clean dishes), 'after' (sounds of dishwashing) and 'in between' (the transformation of a painterly still life into a sticky heap of garbage) gives this modest little demonstration a kind of down-home wisdom that neatly complements its illusionist wit.

Lots of funny movies are on display, a fact that is surprising only in relation to the glum ways in which such films are usually described. Annette Michelson's study of Yvonne Rainer in *Artforum* (January and February, 1974) is invaluable, yet one would never guess from it how side-splitting the latter's work can often be. What seems so striking about these films at Edinburgh, along with George Landow's hilarious patch-quilt oddities like *What's Wrong With This Picture?* and *Wide Angle Saxon*, is the audience rapport they create, a communal experience that one would be hard put to find at screenings of *The Exorcist*, *Jaws* or even Mel Brooks comedies. People may shriek or laugh together at certain commercial films today, but scarcely with the same kinds of warmth or complicity; these are films devoted to feeding myriad forms of alienation, not promoting mutual forms of discovery.

Rainer's third feature, *Kristina Talking Pictures*—unlike her *Lives of Performers* and *Film About a Woman Who...*—uses verbal texts mainly extracted from other sources (including de Beauvoir, Beckett, Cortazar, Schlovsky, Sontag, Speer and Verlaque), but her own sense of pop banality and incongruity is so distinctive that it's usually easy to spot the Rainer lines: 'Her face, like Nixon's, was catching up with her.' 'Are you appalled by the torture of political prisoners and jealous of your wife's success?' 'I'd like to see Elvis Presley and Doris Day describing their experiences in Dachau.' 'I dreamt I had sex with Marlon Brando. He said, "Why don't you brush your teeth? You have the breath of a lion."'

Elsewhere, many of the same motifs (Nixon, lions, political prisoners) and others (like James Cagney) are extended in numerous ways, e.g., echoed or anticipated in photographs on a wall that are sometimes traversed by the camera in the course of pursuing or abandoning other interests. All Rainer's features are precise serious/funny portraits of a specific urban-intellectual mentality which offer themselves as multi-layered, overlapping 'texts', each layer being isolated as a separate but related discourse—such as sound versus image—which obliges each spectator to supply the missing connections. A crucial factor is the ironic ambiguity of the verbal and visual elements themselves, which occupy an area where such values as 'conscious cliché' and 'sincerity' become impossible to disentangle without creative participation. And many (if not all) the resulting quandaries are

* I happen to think that Godard achieved some of these things only seven years later, in *Numéro Deux*—something which I tried to demonstrate in a review in the Spring 1976 *SIGHT AND SOUND*; if Wollen had offered any example of what he meant, a reasoned debate might have been possible. It is distressing to find the latter film vilified so widely at Edinburgh for its 'sexism' and 'mystifications', with little apparent recognition of its remarkable achievements.



'Kristina Talking Pictures' (the face is Cagney's); below: 'Film About a Woman Who ...'
Photographs: Babette Mangolte

marvellously comic, thanks in part to the inimitable dead-pan delivery of the lines and visual clichés.

To my mind, these procedures work most impressively in *Film About a Woman Who ...*, largely because of its ingenious arsenal of 'multi-textual' strategies (a sequence of stills illustrating the shower murder of *Psycho* accompanied by the recitation of another narrative; the camera moving round a woman's face that is plastered with verbal messages, all declarations of love) and the brilliance of Babette Mangolte's photography. But all Rainer's movies are gems: *Lives of Performers*, which most clearly reflects her dance work, intermingles real and fictional aspects of the roles of herself and her performers in several fascinating ways; and *Kristina*, containing her first extended work in colour, includes at least two sequences as remarkable as anything she's done. In the first, the camera prowls ceaselessly round a room while 'Kristina' wakes and dresses, returning again and again to various key objects and places, and in the course of its journeys scanning successive fragments of a farewell letter from Kristina's lover Raoul that is lying on the floor—a process threading together the linear 'narrative' movements of language and camera in a dazzling manner. The second traces a conversation in which one voice becomes matched

in lip-synch with several women while a graceful montage simultaneously parses the phrases and leaps about the room, settling on each 'speaker'. Because Kristina is represented by a series of actresses (including Rainer herself, in a long central episode), these sequences exhibit different applications of the same principle, creating and dismantling the pleasures of illusionism and continuity at the same time.

During the last session, Peter Gidal reads 'The Anti-Narrative: A Condensed Version', which warns against the recuperation of everything in avant-garde into narrative. In the discussion, Adriano Apra—who, at the first session, attacked the avant-garde for 'wanting the safe space of the art gallery rather than the dangerous space of the public theatre'—argues that cinema is the only art form of this century to explore the old concept of magic, with its elements of fascination and identification. Rainer, who has just read a paper of her own entitled 'A Likely Story', replies that magic is dangerous—it can be used by people to control other people.

Putting these points together, I'm afraid I'll have to 'recuperate' a bit in order to describe my experience of two of Gidal's films. When he alternately activates and disrupts certain hypnotic forms of fascination

in his *Room Film 1973* (a film not shown in Edinburgh), I can be drawn into the dialectical pattern, which exerts a 'control' over me and then shows me that control. When fascination appears to be assumed rather than created, as in *C/O/N/S/T/R/U/C/T* (which *is* shown), I'd rather be somewhere else. The fact that the former traverses indistinct portions of an anonymous room (which isn't Gidal's room, as is widely believed), while the latter presents a man putting up a window (as seen through another window) in several overlapping layers, is irrelevant to this question. If the 'subject matter' of either film is ultimately the processes that it sets in motion, 'narrative' is either the film's or one's own record of those processes. By rejecting all notions of narrative and avoiding the issue of fascination in his recent critical writing—most of which I find harder to 'read' than *Room Film 1973*—Gidal effectively outlaws the only kind of pleasure I can find in his films. If *C/O/N/S/T/R/U/C/T* fails to elicit my fascination, it's because I've failed to locate or collaborate in the construction of its narrative; its conceptual interest, which I interpret as notions about construction and windows (or 'windows'), ironically seems too literary.

At the first session, Anthony McCall speaks for 'an art that operates from a radical pleasure principle' and 'explores social organisation', and I see what he means in his own 'film installations'—works in which the beams of projector light are at least as important as the projected images. Two films are projected in adjacent gallery rooms, and as I join a few others in exploring the shifting patterns of each—standing inside or outside the casts of light, gazing at the light or the screen from various positions—the usual divisions of 'artwork', 'self' and 'others' no longer seem to apply in quite the same way. There is nothing very intellectual or rigorous about this experience; it is rather like being a child in an amusement park.

Paul Sharits' *Color Sound Frames* and *Apparent Motion* may operate on a much more 'radical' pleasure principle, but their sensual delights are much less 'social'. My responses to these abstract 'anti-illusionist' works—which present the varying speeds and directions of a succession of individual colour frames and a microscopic investigation of film grain, respectively—are again playful, and enormously liberating after the sheer *work* of following gratuitous plots in the films I am usually glutted with. Their experience is much closer to music than to literature, and I suspect that the rejection of such pleasures by the 'dominant film culture' basically rests on the privileged status of the 19th century novel as the ultimate model of excellence.

Writing a year ago about avant-garde in Edinburgh, I deliberately situated my remarks between those positions which I identified with 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. This time, I feel more like an ambassador from a neutral country, visiting one of the two Major Powers in the midst of a Cold War; needless to say, I feel the same way in London, where the other Power reigns. The sense of mutual antipathy is so strong that one is tempted to think that, as *social entities*, the two factions need and resemble one another more than either would care to admit;



they're even quite compatible as long as they remain exclusive categories, with fixed ghetto boundaries. 'Insiders' might be willing to see *Lancelot du Lac*, but they aren't likely to take it seriously. 'Outsiders' might be willing to take *Wavelength* seriously, but they aren't likely to see it. The whole thing gets a bit wearying if one is finally more interested in films than categories.

My 'neutral' peace offering at Edinburgh—or 'intervention'—is arranging for a screening of Rivette's *Duelle* outside the Event, after being assured that the organisers are unwilling to show it themselves. Particularly because it is a film whose very terms are likely to be misunderstood in an 'outsider' context, my assumption is that it might provoke at least curiosity and interest here. By and large, I prove to be mistaken: the most common response I encounter is a reading of *Duelle* as a 'conventional' poetic fantasy à la Cocteau that is 'accepted'—hence rejected—on a purely illusionistic level.

Yet to compare the film to Cocteau—let us say *Orphée*—one would first have to outline the processes determining the conditions and boundaries of each. In *Orphée*, one has to consider a Greek myth filtered through the sensibility of a specific auteur to construct a contemporary legend referring to his own self-definition, his vocation as a poet; and the film (that is to say, the film's experience) must be located in all the stages of this process, not at some imaginary or idealist end-point conceived as a 'product'. Not surprisingly, the mirror in *Orphée*—representing the narcissistic relation of auteur and spectator to the screen, if we recall 'the mirror phase'—functions as a locus of passage.

The mirror in *Duelle* cracks, however, halfway through the film, when the only male hero (Jean Babilée) points at it. Here one must consider a myth-in-progress being constructed moment to moment by a variety of auteurs out of a diversity of sources—organised by one individual who allows for elements of chance (an improvising pianist) as well as control (scripted dialogue) to dictate the terms of that organisation. The disparity of the myth's sources can be seen in the goddesses' names—Leni (Juliet Berto) and Viva (Bulle Ogier)—which evoke the 'myths' associated respectively with Leni Riefenstahl and the Warhol Superstar; set

against this odd combination are other notions suggesting a 'ghost' story (Leni) and a 'fairy' tale (Viva). A 'transcendental' diamond—granting life on earth to wealthy goddesses and beatific madness to proletarian mortals—serves as a kind of narrative pretext that, as in Hitchcock's *Family Plot*, 'directs' the characters with the irresistible precision of a magnet, becoming at once their focal and rallying points—and, by implication, ours.

The sheer gratuity of this desired object makes it the appropriate emblem of the lure of narrative/illusionist cinema—why we let ourselves be lulled into 'mythical' fictions. If the giant diamond of *Family Plot* is captured and guarded by the upper-class couple, sought by the police (like the solution to any 'mystery'), and ultimately used as the proletarian heroine's means of deceiving the proletarian hero—with a wink at the audience paradoxically sealing that deception—the equally outsize diamond in *Duelle*, captured by working-class characters and sought by wealthy ones, is altogether more abstract and 'theoretical'. It is not exchangeable for money, police are non-existent, and no explanation is offered of why goddesses should want to become earthly, or mortals ethereal: each desire becomes an equivalent form of 'madness', the *folie* that cinema itself trades on. (The movie star who pretends and/or wants to be a 'real' person; the spectator who identifies with screen deities.) Which is only to say that, transcendently speaking, Hitchcock (like Cocteau) remains the true believer, Rivette the confirmed agnostic, yet both remain equally obsessed with the object of their attention, the screen, fascinated by its glitter.

If *Orphée* presupposes a firm belief in fiction (myth) as a poetic way of seeing the world, *Duelle* acknowledges and reactivates the desire for that belief while refusing to satisfy it; the 'world' itself remains too unstable, the fiction too artificial. Precisely because what the myth refers back to is so scattered and discontinuous, one has to regard it as something 'referring ahead' to a specific set of formal conditions, e.g., the brightness associated with the blonde sun-fairy Viva, the darkness linked to the brunette moon-ghost Leni. The mystery's solution is nothing but the formulation of these terms, and its 'resolution' is simply

their dissolution—the successive elimination of each character; the final blending of light and darkness into the grey cast of dawn. Both of these come together in the film's chilling, unexpected last cut, from the last mad mortal—the same character who is 'unbalanced' on a ball in the opening shot, embodying the spectator's suspensions—to the end titles, propelling fiction and spectator into the void from which they came. And the sound of a train arriving over the beginning and final credits may suggest another locus of passage; yet here it is impossible to say from where or towards what.

Clearly conceived as an 'impossible object' no less than *Re-Grouping*, Rivette's disquieting form of aggravation is even given two impossible titles: the feminine form of a masculine noun in French; and in English, a Joycean pun—*Twilight*—conveying both its terms of suspension (a series of *whys*, for Rivette and spectator alike) and dissolution (dusk equalling dawn). Yet as soon as one converts it from object into process, a sense of the possible—the fascination of an agnostic for a hypothesis—becomes everywhere apparent. As long as one is willing to contend with the challenge of ambivalent diamonds and shattering mirrors, moving back and forth between illusion and disillusionment, myth and demythification, like a ball in a tennis match, this aggravation can lead straight to lucidity. Like all works that are potentially avant-garde in effect—using that term ahistorically, and again in reference to a process, not an object—it postulates and defines a new kind of spectator. But this definition is mainly rejected at Edinburgh by spectators who like to keep their narrative illusionism and their avant-garde separate, uncontaminated by any mutual embrace.

A few overall trends become evident over the course of the week—the sophistication of many avant-garde films by English students, for instance, which I'm told compares quite favourably with their American counterparts. (Christopher Swayne's *Reading, Forgetting...* is an especially intriguing example.) Even if a feature like *Justine* suggests that pre-production discussions were probably a lot more interesting than anything which turns up on the screen, the ambitiousness of such an enterprise seems so admirable in the teeth of such indifference that the mere fact of its existence is somewhat awe-inspiring. Combined with other factors—such as a general demystification of the North American avant-garde, particularly in relation to politics and theory—this level of aspiration implies that a genuinely independent English cinema may be in the process of formation... or at least formulation.

A solid sense of the English avant-garde's collective identity does seem to emerge, sparked in part by the arrival of a readable new issue of *Afterimage* devoted to that subject. (A new number of *Framework*—more relevant to the concerns of the first week, with an excellent piece by Heath on *Jaws*—also turns up.) Often a lot calmer, less bullying and more rigorous than many of the official 'stars' at the open discussions, the voices at the back of the room leave a lingering impression. Perhaps this might grow into something even more formidable at next year's festival... assuming that a conjuncture of forces lets it happen. ■

'Duelle': Leni (Juliet Berto) in darkness, Viva (Bulle Ogier) in the light



David Thomson

ALL ALONG



'That's the second sentence you started with "I".—Leland in Citizen Kane

THE RIVER

Red River was the first film I saw twice, and I have made a habit of seeing it. It was an early indication that I loved the movie experience more than specific films, for it showed me that a film was not just a photographed story but a phenomenon. Long before I conceived of authors, I had felt character and force in cinema and wanted to draw both into myself. When it was reissued, in 1963, it struck me that films might be like places and the cinema a medium of location and activity in which the subject of *Red River* was simply 'seeing *Red River*'.

Ten years later, I tried 'teaching' the film to students and at the same time introduced it to my son. A teacher is expected to instruct objective study of films. But I realised how proud I was of *Red River*, and how awkward and embarrassed a defender of it that made me. Awareness of its part in my development left me vulnerable to students' condescension towards any John Wayne movie. In expounding it as a Hawksian picture, I only began to notice how far I was the author of my *Red River*. More recently, in August 1976, during an English drought, the full *Red River* passed by again, twenty minutes of its original flow restored—perhaps in the early 60s those cuts had been led away to irrigate arid TV Westerns. I am impressed now that it has always been a confluence of films, as many as there were Rouen Cathedrals for Monet, and as many as there are fleeting shells of appearance on a river whether it unwinds in sun or gloom, all alike but all unique. If films were truly sin-

gular, they would no longer be made. The medium exists through people in the audience seeing their own film, and feeling so sure of their vision that they enter into it.

Critics write about films decisively and in the spirit of explanation. It is the only way—one cannot wait twenty-eight years for a review, and readers expect clarity and guidance. But film's inescapable movement, and its mimicry of time, make it an intriguing model of the change that comprises our lives. Not much writing about film has dealt with the way films alter as we grow older, and I would like to consider thirty years beside *Red River* to suggest the importance of this property.

Red River was filmed in 1947 and released in 1948, and I saw it in suburban London in the winter of 1948–9, when I was nearly or just eight. That London was the only place I knew, but social history today might point

to its pinched austerity, the scattering of bombed houses where kids could play and the natural delight of such a child in the cinematic expansiveness of *Red River*. I was intensely moved by the film, and I may have revisited it to calm myself, to repeat the pleasure or even to fashion myself further.

At that age, I must have had to be taken, and my father then was my usual companion at the movies. But I recall *Red River* as if I were alone with it, immersion obscuring all associations. In hindsight, though, I feel sure that my attention was drawn to the rivalry between a father and a son-figure and to the underlying wish for warmth between them. Thus, now, I see my identification with the film as predicting an actual tension with my own father. I will not invite embarrassment with an unduly personal revelation, yet it should be said that the Hollywood movie's playing upon fantasy involvement did regularly strike into our sentimental depths with an intimacy that we seldom admit. As a child, I fastened on the boy Matthew Garth who becomes Montgomery Clift as a taciturn young adult. Only now do I appreciate the lasting hold of that response.

Red River is one of those Hawks movies that begins, as it were, a moment too late, with the action already under way. A wagon train is passing through a picturesque valley and, simultaneously, one wagon pulls out of

line and, in an epiphany of time and place, a cloud hurries across the sun and its shadow surges along the floor of the valley. I was pricked by that at eight and felt, as I hadn't done before, the precise actuality of film. Perhaps that moment helped me think *Red River* was preciously real and worthy of my participation.

The couple in the wagon quitting the train are Tom Dunson (John Wayne) and Groot (Walter Brennan). The wagonmaster claims it is Wayne's duty to stay, but he replies that he gave no guarantee and is free to go his own way, with the valuable bull trailing along behind his wagon. Obligation, independence and withdrawal from the group are lasting themes struck up in this first sequence. Wayne's girl (Coleen Gray) begs to be taken along too, but Wayne denies her because it will be dangerous. He is vague but firm, as if disconcerted by the prospect of a woman's constant company. She must stay with the others, and he will come for her later when he is established on his own land. As a surety he gives her a bangle that was his mother's. Even at eight I knew the parting was final; years later, it looks like escape for the man. How would he ever find her again in all the breadth of virgin America invoked in this valley? (Will Jack Nicholson be there months after *Missouri Breaks* when the girl comes looking for him, or off and away playing his clarinet in another state?)

Wayne and Brennan depart, and the film goes with them. It is not long before black smoke and ominous drums in Dmitri Tiomkin's score tell us that the wagon train has been attacked. The two men prepare for a raiding party sent after their obvious trail. It comes at night, with birdcalls from the brush and a lovely flurry of painless action. The stars survive, but in a hand-to-hand encounter Wayne finds that the Indian he is stabbing—in a stream, or an infant river—is wearing the bangle he gave Coleen. It is a memento passed through the film: a sentimental keepsake, but something like a handcuff.

They move on and meet a boy—ten or twelve, I think—wandering in a movie delirium, leading a cow. There is an immediate conflict between Wayne and the boy: Wayne slaps his face to halt his hysteria and the

boy draws a gun. Wayne pretends to be impressed, relaxes the boy and then simply but roughly disarms him. This signalled how far the lost child had found a commanding father. Reconciled, they team up—bull and cow—and Wayne hands back the child's gun with the advice to watch a man carefully; young Matthew devours that homily with an eagerness that promises eventual confrontation. Their pistol-play, I suppose, could be as Freudian as that in *Bonnie and Clyde*, but I doubt if Hawks ever suspected Penn's deliberate comparison in his own film. Still, the gun will be used again. Clift and John Ireland compare guns in a wary test of virility, and Clift's becoming a thoughtful critic of Wayne will be acted out in his marginally beating his 'father' to the draw, and thus preventing him killing, burying and reading over another man.

It is impossible to write now as I felt then. I have to reinvent myself, and must admit the tricky ground between reliable memory and the creative urge to be autobiographical. At eight I saw a bull and a cow, and not any personal implications of their coming together, much less a man who has lost his woman picking up a boy. My feelings were fixed on that quick clash of wills between the grown man and the orphan he was on the point of adopting. The slap that brought Matthew into action I felt as much as I have since felt the passionate vanity and resentment when Kane slaps Susan in their tent and someone far away—in the audience?—cries hysterically. In *Red River*, the meeting scene was compelling because I identified with man and boy: I felt heartened and safer that they would be together. But the scene also uncovered the rivalry possible between two males determined to make up their own minds and live by the decision. *Red River* deals with judgment, and the way kindness and flexibility must temper correctness. Wayne's dark solitariness—so impressive as the years and miles accumulate—is the effect of his righteous solitariness.

A great part of the mythic vitality in *Red River* has to do with activity. Hawks is not often a poetic film-maker, but the passage in which the three go farther south and come finally to 'their' land is deliberately beautiful.

I measured the wagon's trek and then the fulfilment of coming to ideal spaciousness. Wayne grabs up a handful of dirt and strolls away from the camera: it is the very stance and image that Ford framed in a doorway at the end of *The Searchers* eight years later.

As a child I felt myself growing up when Clift returned from the Civil War, lean, dark and a gunslinger, but watchful of the way his father's back hurt as he hauled himself into his saddle. Before we detect it, Clift remarks on the hard crust of anxiety that has grown around Wayne's strength. The adult Clift combines sensitivity and ability, and this sympathetic watching of his father—like Wayne with Dean Martin in *Rio Bravo*—is followed by the duel by target shooting with Cherry. The latter is an uncouth but assertive gunman, played by John Ireland, who instantly throws in with Wayne when his cautious employer won't let him repossess the cattle Wayne has just stamped his own brand on. Cherry is shaggy and untidy. He seemed to the child distasteful and threatening, and he is an oddity in a Hawks movie who shows what a very conservative, dapper cowboy Clift is. Ireland's Cherry might have lasted long enough for a *Wild Bunch*; he is a mongrel who reveals the tight-lipped pedigree in Hawks heroes.

By now, there are more cows than people in the film. In the fifteen or so years covered by a fade out and fade in, the bull and the cow have produced a great herd that must be taken to Missouri to be sold. The larger part of the action concerns that drive, and I relished every detail of trail-life: riding point or drag, the fatigue of the day and the quiet company of the camp at evening, the stampede that results from a soft cowboy's craving for sugar, and the triumphal crossing of the Red River itself, when the herd comes to a river milky in the sun—a Renoir river, I saw later—and, within ten minutes, negotiates it. Men on horses chart a safe way across and then the hot cows spill into the water and Tiomkin's music takes up the line of advance and achievement while the images illustrate the genre subject: a Great Herd Crossing a Great River. The script refers to a few head lost, but we see none. It is a river made to display man's prowess, and not like the river in *Deliverance* that is as cold, swift and dangerous as nature treated too lightly.

Wayne has aged in the 15-year elapse. When I first saw the film I was impressed by the authenticity of this process: film can show the young what ageing means before they appreciate it in life. Growing older, Wayne withdrew into the domineering strictness in Dunson's character. He became tyrannical, driving the men remorselessly, never attempting the Hollywood officer-skipper who jollies and encourages his men, and makes for such a blissful harmony in *Air Force* that war itself is subdued.

It is a mark of Wayne's intransigence and isolation that only he fails to see the strain this extremism puts upon Clift. The other cowboys have noticed the son becoming a more silent, less convinced support, and the audience are waiting for him to rebel. Like feeling a body in the dark, so in a film you know where dramatic alteration will come. If men and cows were not merely to reach Missouri, a crisis was as necessary as the psychological antagonism between father and son.

Dunson (John Wayne) and the young Matthew Garth (Mickey Kuhn)



Clift takes the cows by another, speculative route to Abilene, leaving Wayne wounded but balefully vengeful. The herd reaches its destination, and Clift's gamble is justified—every decision in the film is tested. But along the way they rescue a wagon train besieged by Indians: fifteen years later, it is the train Wayne abandoned, and there is another dark girl in it, Tess Millay, or Joanne Dru. She slaps Clift's face too, after he has sucked venom from an arrow wound in what the child thought must be the top of her fine breast, but the adult discovered was only a cold shoulder. The slap again promises love, just as the repression of any complaint when the arrow pinned her to a wagon showed that Dru was a girl fit for a Hawks hero, laconic, manly, yet performing bravery to show that no one takes it too seriously.

The rescuers stay awhile, and Dru talks to Brennan about Clift. Lyricism in Hawks consists of men recounting stories about comrades, and inspired she goes out into the mist to find a nervy Clift on guard. Ostensibly he is watching over the herd, but we know he is waiting for Wayne and calculating how many days behind the limping father must be. Dru gathers enough of the story to arrest Wayne when he comes through days later in pursuit. She advertises the bangle Wayne gave to Coleen Gray, and the father sees that his son has a lover such as he was too proud or fearful to stay with. Their scene together is shifting and enigmatic: Dru hints at giving herself to Wayne to save Clift, while he longs for a true son. Times and characters merge in Hawks' favourite issue between the sexes: the ability or not to admit need and mistake.

But Wayne goes on to Abilene, apparently unable to soften. He crosses the railway tracks that proved him wrong and strides through the cattle milling in the street. He guns down Cherry without breaking stride and advances on the slender Clift. He challenges his son to draw, but Matthew is meek and allows himself to be shot at and then beaten with fists before he retaliates. The full fist battle is interrupted by Dru firing a gun and telling them to grow up. She scolds them for pretending to be unrelenting enemies when everyone else knows how much they love one another. The two battered men are transfixed by such understanding. Wayne tells Clift to marry the girl, and Clift tells him to stop telling other people what to do. Wayne grins and, in the dust they were kicking up, he redesigns the 'family' brand: a river with a D, and now with the addition of an earned M.

It is a very happy ending—such as Hawks has always attempted, without strain or loaded optimism. But I have imagined them all going back to Texas, and I suspect that Clift went on to become the querulous Braxton in *Missouri Breaks*, as dogmatic as Wayne, deserted one day by Dru and left with a daughter worthy of Hawks and with *Tristram Shandy* as a consolation.

In my life there followed something like the interval in the first part of *Red River*. I did not see the film again except for a glimpse in Visconti's forgettable *Bellissima*, when an open-air movie in the background was showing *Red River*. I could not hope to resemble the Montgomery Clift back from the war, and by 1963 anyway Clift was a shaken,



Before the drive; and (below) the final reconciliation in Abilene: John Wayne, Montgomery Clift

damaged man, no longer sufficiently at ease for Hawks' world. By then I knew who Hawks was, and knew that he was to be admired. *Rio Bravo* had appeared in 1958, and though in all its length and delight there was no river, there was the same preoccupation with idealised action and friendship, the same impetuous, attractive girl, Wayne and Brennan an odd couple still together but perversely reluctant to declare their dependence on one another. Wayne in that film wore a belt with its buckle in the form of a river and a D—there are photographs of Hawks, too, wearing such a belt—but apparently the planned amendment at the end of *Red River* was never made. I wonder if Clift ever had such a souvenir?

Memories of *Red River* and the general availability of the river-like leisureliness of *Rio Bravo* in my late teens allowed me to follow the appreciation of Hawks in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, brought me to the National Film Theatre's 1962 Hawks season and made me feel part of a family when I read Peter Bog-

danovich's long, easy-going and tolerant interview with Hawks in *Movie's* December 1962 celebration of the director. A few months later, *Red River* was itself revived, initially at the Plaza, accompanied by a grotesque disaster, *The Cool Mikado*, which augured Michael Winner. Hawks' film was cut by twenty minutes, apparently for no other reason than to make room for the English silliness.* By then, *Red River* was one of the few Hawks movies that several of his adherents had not seen, and I am sure I claimed and revealed the film to those with whom I pursued picture shows. The auteur theory now seems to me a device whereby critics and enthusiasts appropriate films—no

* I have since heard a story to this effect: the cuts mostly involve John Ireland (including the target-shooting with Clift) and were allegedly the result of some pique in Hawks when his newest discovery, Joanne Dru, fell in love with Ireland while the film was being made. That may shock those most devoted to the old man, but it is worthy of Grant in *Girl Friday*.





'Hawks would have gone into the studio, to dwell upon the conversations he prefers . . .' Joanne Dru and John Wayne

one else has felt the duty to explain them with such confessional diligence.

Hawks was so suited to the auteur theory that I cannot escape the suspicion that a band of ardent young men, wanting to make films but protected from industrial realities by the dark of the cinema and a high faith in art, invented him. (A boy lost in the prairie might hope for such an older man coming to rescue him.) Hawks is a character from his own world; and if that world now appears to rely on pretence, it does reflect on its author. Auteurism applied to the cinema is as romantic as hero-worship, but Hawks was a hero who disguised the greatest dangers of distant devotion. There has never been effort, pretension or artiness in his work. He has seemed comfortable in more Hollywood genres than any other director, yet able to draw his honourable and accomplished men to every surface, there to be perplexed by garrulous and emotional women. Never a complainer against the system, always entertaining and in character, Hawks appealed to young critics tired of European hostility to Hollywood and its disparagement of fluent and enjoyable movies. It was then and remains part of Hawks' depth that he is serious but never grave—his comedies exemplify this above all.

This warm approach praised him in ways that were curiously personal and tendentious. In France, England and America, there were those who seemed to be looking for a sensible, alert and wry father in Hawks, a man who made graceful movies under pressure. By 1963 I saw not the least reason to quarrel with *Movie's* estimate of him: 'He makes the very best adventure films because he is at one with his heroes . . . For Hawks, who drove racing cars for a living and built aeroplanes before he was twenty, men prove themselves through mastery of their own actions . . . Hawks heroes are professionals doing jobs—scientists, sheriffs, cattlemen, big game hunters: real professionals who know their capabilities. Their courage is the product of their self-knowledge . . . When one talks about the heroes of *Red River*, or *Rio Bravo*, or *Hatari!* one is talking about

Hawks himself. The professionalism of his heroes is shared by the director. They get on with the job without any unnecessary nonsense. So does Hawks. He can say what he wants to through actions, because his is a cinema of action.'

In fact, that is remarkably close to the literary or ideological criticism *Movie* disapproved of in other quarters. It asks one to accept the virtues and integrity of a man, rather than scrutinise the text of his films. Indeed, it is very like the general critical estimate of Hemingway and apparently swallows the artist's own insinuation that there is a no-nonsense bond between himself and his work—that one can actually cross the river and go into the books. The very satisfying simplicity of Hawks' style and his unhurried structures easily persuaded young viewers of a maturity, a levelness and an uncluttered wisdom in the man himself. It was possible to come away from Hawks with a comfortable view of a manageable world, for his 'professionalism' made it subservient and responsive; it came when you whistled, like a Hollywood horse, or Lauren Bacall. Hemingway tried to reassure himself in this very way with his own portraits of conscientious, intelligent men caught up in decisive action. But he shot himself nonetheless, maddened by anxieties and old age and perhaps by his own inability to walk on the water across the river.

It is delicate to have to suggest that some of us grew up through Hawks' view of manliness, so I had better say that I think I sometimes modelled myself on, say, Grant in *Only Angels Have Wings*, Bogart in *To Have and Have Not*—so many worlds removed from Hemingway's Harry Morgan—as well as Clift in *Red River*. Hawks therefore became a test of character, and I fell in beside him, just as Clift obediently followed the unflawed authority of Wayne.

That state of mind held for a decade, during which I re-saw every Hawks movie that came my way and enjoyed Robin Wood's study of the director, even if I was a little disconcerted by the picture it conjured of Hawks and F. R. Leavis rolling cigarettes for

one another. I nodded understandingly when *The Last Picture Show* proved to be *Red River* with the silent, circling pan at dawn before the great drive begins.

My happy attitude towards *Red River** was not jolted until 1972, when I included the film in a course on American cinema for American students in England. Their friendly approach could not accept the film on my terms, and I had to see how far my proprietorship isolated me from their reactions. They heartily disapproved of John Wayne and could only see one more instance of his capacity for bullying. The film entertained them, but they were amused by its steady allegiance to the romantic clichés of the Western. When I tried to argue the merits of practical realism embodied in the film, their eyebrows went up: they found it predictable, thoroughly artificial and impossible to take seriously.

The challenge was as demanding as Clift's mixed emotions before he commandeers Wayne's herd and re-directs the drive. I had to concede that *Red River* belonged to a tradition as much as to Hawks, and that the heroic postures available in the tradition might invalidate my sense of an elegant, curt realism in Hawks. To retaliate, I went deeper into *Red River's* study of fatal stubbornness. I hold to that still—stubbornly—and believe it is worked out with unusual sensitivity, especially in the bitterness that overtakes Wayne's initial decisiveness. As his back stiffens, the face retracts and his hair goes ashen: it is an unsentimental picture of ageing, and I respect it more now that my own back gives me trouble. I insist still that the film is taut with the unowned affection between the two male characters, both of whom are essentially solitary, and that our identification with both characters ensures an unusually complex response to the pursuit and the final confrontation.

I hope I made some students consider that human subtlety, and demonstrated the self-effacing narrative felicity. But I could no longer abide by the notion of Hawks the professional, the describer of doing. *Red River's* tone is that of meditative legend, of camp-fire yarns* told by men actually less than easy with horses, guns and cows but yearning for the flourish of expertise and finding it in fiction. That is the West outlined in another film with a river, *The Missouri Breaks*, and its delicious trial scene in which a convicted prisoner is asked for a 'colourful' final address—'life on the frontier being what it is'—to which he willingly complies with the earnest hope that he might thereafter be known as 'the Lonesome Kid', harbinger of Warhol's melancholy and moody cowboys.

Perhaps *Red River* is made by one lonesome kid for others; most fiction is produced to meet such needs. The only practical skill it illustrates is how to make a compelling movie. The crossing of the Red—almost certainly filmed by assistant director Arthur Rosson—is an exercise in heroic generalisation. I doubt if the combined editorial boards of *Movie* and *Cahiers du Cinéma* could

* *Red River* is told by Walter Brennan's Groot. In the complete version seen in 1976, the film uses—rather laboriously—pages from a journal he has written. Yet I believe there are versions where Brennan narrates the story—if there are not, there should be.

get a bull and a cow across the road on the strength of it. When Wayne fights the Indian wearing his mother's bangle, Brennan throws him a knife and, as if by magic and terse cutting, the useful weapon clings to his upthrust hand. That is how action occurs in *Red River*: with the sweet timing of day-dream. The target-shooting is a reverie. No shot in the film goes anywhere other than where intended—no shot in any film ever misses—no remark fails to be both laconic and revealing. Rummies in Hawks movies sober up whenever cut-throat music is played. Life's leaking inaccuracy and failed eloquence are redeemed.

The drive itself is a glorious illusion. When the complete version of *Red River* reappeared in the summer of 1976 in the National Film Theatre's second Hawks season, I realised that nearly every landscape is from the valley where the cloud moves across the sun. The sensation of journey is an artful trick. In reality, the cows must have trampled that one valley flat for a fortnight as the camera covered them from a compass of angles. Only then would Hawks have gone into the studio, to dwell upon the conversations he prefers, to construct an Abilene on the back-lot and to film the several day exteriors in which there is crucial, close action, accomplished on screen with the deftness that persuaded some of us of Hawks' own mastery of action.

All I see now is that there is no need or reason to be pleased with Hawks as anything other than a compiler of fictions. Real men of action presumably lead active, adventurous lives—and die young; real artists spend much of their time alone ruminating on things that will never be, except in a work of fiction. Man's favourite sport is to describe feats he has not managed in life. Such tranquillity may make one linger on past eighty. In *Rio Bravo*, Walter Brennan is not just an amusing old man with a bad leg, but someone hurt that those defects keep him out of things yet still alive. 'Kid' in *Only Angels* wipes himself out when he can no longer deny that his sight is going.

Hawks is not a forder of rivers; his dryness could never risk a real soaking. He is a man who has filled his life contemplating the river and turning away periodically to make a beguiling model of it, another stream, dark and shiny as celluloid. He is not showing us men, but men on film, where their words and actions are protected. But he is shrewd enough to see how unreal and playful that makes the product, and I think that his films need to be approached as performances of a game—a game called man as contented hero.

With that approach, one can echo Joanne Dru's irritation when she breaks up the family fight: who ever thought either one of that pair would kill the other? Who ever thought there was the least element of reality in the phantom shapes forming and reforming on the screen? One might as easily suggest that there is a single appearance on the surface of a river. Hawks offers us a world of straight-faced make-believe, and as soon as one looks past real ranchers and real cows in *Red River* it becomes easier to discern the mythic quality of love between men.

One should not ignore the droll continuity of allusions to homosexuality in Hawks' outposts. Of all American directors, he most

teases us with the implications of men feeling more comfortable and faithful with one another than with women. All those sharp girls are outsiders, admired and able to help in moments of crisis but generally excluded from the most intimate associations—most of which are realised dreams of lonesome kids in which buddies achieve that rapt and effortless communion that is the one paradise glimpsed in American cinema.

Hawks is not a misogynist, but he is awed by women, fearful of the disruption they bring, perhaps as harassed as Wayne with Angie Dickinson or, like Bogart after Bacall has left the room in *To Have and Have Not*, grinning and whistling to himself. Notice how quickly Hawks despatches final embraces. His understatement turns to real reserve with love, and he is like Grant at the end of *Only Angels*, preferring a joke or an oblique admission that Jean Arthur only appreciates when he is up and away, in the air with a pal. I cannot think of a man in a Hawks movie who professes love naturally and willingly. That is always assumed but unadmitted in the turbulent sexual banter he pursues; whereas men live together in a harmony like the jailhouse sing-song in *Rio Bravo*, one of the supreme domestic tableaux in American cinema.

This is not meant as a rejection of Hawks. He remains my favourite director, and I would prefer his films on a desert island to any other director's—even if his films can make life like a desert island. But not because the movies apply themselves to the world, not for their practicality or actuality, not because he is any less 'frivolous' than Ophuls or Busby Berkeley. Like the rest of cinema, Hawks' river is an alternative to life's stream, sometimes able to water us better than the reality.

Hemingway, I think, was a fantasist, ashamed of playing with words and driven to pretend a feeling for flamboyant, masculine pastimes. His nature lay in imagining things, and the same applies to Hawks. Anyone truly interested in racing cars and flying planes would have got on with that, like the pre-eminent lonesome kid, Howard Hughes, who contrived to die while flying, and who fired Hawks from *The Outlaw*, so blatant a joke about Jane Russell's breasts that its tremulous closeness between males escaped censors and audiences alike. Hawks spent

his adult life in film studios, on films about racing cars and aeroplanes, including the stunning 360° track from *Only Angels* when the plane lands on the plateau—flying made accessible for the armchair pilot. All of Hawks' pictures are versions of one work: like Renoir, and nearly as often, he made one film or kept wandering back to the river, like Slim Pickens in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* who drags himself to the water to die.

Renoir has as many real rivers as Hawks, and his photography is more impressionistic and less polished. But for both men, the river is an ideal. *Rio Bravo* admits that the film is the river, and which of Renoir's films could not conceivably be called *The River*, with that picture's last lines as a motto:

The river runs, the round world spins
Dawn and lamplight, midnight, noon.
Sun follows day, night stars and moon.
The day ends, the end begins.

That endless mobility allows 'a girl' to be inhabited in passing by a dozen actresses from Louise Brooks to Paula Prentiss, just as it is the impulse of change that prompts restless cupid to fly away again.

In India, Renoir found the mystical expression of a reverence for life that had always informed his work, and armed us against the change, loss and passing time in his films. The same optimism possesses Hawks, and together the two look down on so much pessimism in the rest of cinema. That is why neither Clift nor Wayne dies: because it is only play, and it is in life that people die, whereas in films they are already phantoms or figments. The river is dappled light and motion, and so is film. The shapes we see in both—Boudu rolling away from tedious society or Wayne's cattle crossing the Red—are as fictional as the two boats that pass by at the end of *Celine and Julie*. And Hawks is like those two girls, just as either would have landed happily in one of his films. He has made the sweet last longer than most and it has conjured delectable and consistent pictures—a blithe, happy idyll of companionship.

But sweets dissolve and rivers exhaust the stamina of human lives. *Red River* is a fiction, and my writing about it now will not stop it changing. When I see it next it will be different and I will discover myself mistaken. The cinema is a river of no return. ■

The beginning of the film: 'one wagon pulls out of the line ...'



The uproar made by Marshall McLuhan's writings on television a decade ago has long since died down, and in the aftermath many have questioned what all the fuss was about. His designations of media as either 'cool' or 'hot' seem curiously archaic today, and the zippy multi-media approach of such 'design' books as *The Global Village* survives merely as a shadowy artifact of the hectic 60s. If the rapid burn-out of McLuhan's electronic ontology were merely a fad, it would scarcely deserve notice. In fact, however, McLuhan was, and remains, a gifted scholar, and his more 'traditional' writings—such as his superb essay on *King Lear* in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*—have not diminished in importance. If McLuhan's Baedeker of the new electronic world seems inadequate today, we shall have to look beyond his cartography if we hope to find the causes.

Paul Mareth

America's Public Broadcasting Service

PUBLIC VISIONS: PRIVATE VOICES

*Public Broadcasting:
the Sheldon Trio at
Scotts Bluff in
western Nebraska*



Certainly much of the impact that McLuhan's writings had in the mid-60s was due not to what he specifically said about television, but simply to the fact that he, and he alone, was at last saying something. Television was not an invention which spread logically through the strata of society like the telephone or the electric light; it exploded into our lives, going from zero to full saturation in less than fifteen years. By the 1960s, when the average American family was watching television about forty-five hours a week, serious critics were still either ignoring the medium entirely or else simply reviewing it, like a continually running play.

Concurrent with the publication of McLuhan's theories, a great deal of public speculation was going on in the mid-60s about the vast changes and technological mutations which were just around the corner. The business and scientific press were continually publishing articles on the new forms which the electronic media would take in the 70s; many of these articles made their way into the popular press. Intellectuals became obsessed with the forms of the new technology; one has only to think of the wall TVs in Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*.

Perhaps the most salient fact about current television is that the future simply has not occurred. Technologically, we are almost precisely where we were ten years ago. What were these confidently anticipated developments, and why haven't they happened?

The Future That Wasn't

In 1970, *Time* magazine ran a story about Paul Klein, a vice-president of the National Broadcasting Corporation. Klein had announced that he was leaving NBC to set up a company of his own to produce and market a new type of 'computer television'. For a small monthly fee, subscribers would have a small device wired to their TV sets. This would be connected to a central computer, which in turn would control a battery of videotape machines and film-chains. A monthly guide would be sent to subscribers, listing a large variety of programmes and films, each with a number code. By punching in the proper code, a viewer could select the programme he wished to see, at the time he wished to see it, uninterrupted by commercials or announcements, at a cost of 25 cents per hour. In short, the system would give television the flexibility, range and cheapness of records, and it was projected for widespread use by 1975. The following week, Mr. Klein wrote to *Time*, confirming the general accuracy of the story but emphasising that he expected widespread use to begin in 1972. So far, the system has not been introduced, even on a pilot level. Instead, Computer Television, Inc. went into the business of showing feature films over TV sets in hotel chains. This venture was quite successful, and the firm was eventually acquired by Time-Life. Klein himself has returned to NBC.

Less far-reaching were the plans for low-cost video-disc systems, whereby TV programmes could be bought on records for about \$10 apiece (the present cost of one hour of blank two-inch videotape is about

\$250). Two separate systems were developed, one by Philips, the other by RCA. (The systems remain incompatible, a situation analogous to having gramophone records marketed both in their current disc and original cylinder form.) Both were to have been introduced by 1974; neither has been. A spokesman for RCA told me that the company has not set any date for the unveiling of its system, and that the delay was caused both by performance problems and the general state of the economy.

The technological revolution was to have had its social and economic side as well. In a famous position paper written in 1966, Fred Friendly, the former president of CBS News and now media adviser to the Ford Foundation, advocated public ownership of a communications satellite, with certain channels leased out to commercial owners. The revenues thus generated were to be used for the maintenance of a multi-faceted public TV and open communications network. The plan was never implemented.

A cursory review like this can sketch the parameters of several proposals, but it cannot give a sense of the way such thinking pervaded the public mind and imagination during the 60s. For every Paul Klein, there were three other serious and respected media executives who had even more far-reaching plans. It became increasingly common for sociologists, economists and political scientists to take positions and issue predictions which postulated these developments as irrefutable axioms. Indeed, the literature of the 1960s abounded with proposals and speculation about media technology the way that the literature of the 1840s abounded with proposals and speculation about 'new societies' and utopian communes.

The point here is not only that this kind of thinking has died, but that its death is so conspicuously unnoticed. It is strange to consider that the last major breakthrough in media technology took place in 1962, with the launching of the first communications satellite. Since then, the only developments have been indeed minor: the miniaturisation of video cameras, the slow and highly limited spread of cable-TV systems, manufacturing refinements in colour picture tubes, and the like. For those whose intellectual timetables were predicated on the arrival of a new electronic culture, it must seem a particularly cruel irony that the hottest item in the exclusive department stores this season is an electronic device which connects to a TV set and permits the owner to play ping-pong and war games.

The Present That Is

The demise of the future has of course left the centurions of the present in excellent condition. The three major commercial networks (CBS, NBC and ABC), which have enjoyed an almost unbroken record of profitability since the days of radio serials, are benefiting from an unprecedented seller's market. By last summer it had become virtually impossible to buy commercial space in some time slots. Privately owned individual stations which serve a local market are in an even more enviable position, for their programming is less care-



Plays on PBS: Julie Harris in 'The Last of Mrs. Lincoln'; Andy Griffith and John Houseman in 'Six Characters in Search of an Author'

fully scrutinised by governmental and consumer groups, their technical and content standards are low, and the station's economic power in its market is profound.

Public television, too, is experiencing record growth, financing and recognition. It has well survived the trauma it experienced when its long-time benefactor, the Ford Foundation, withdrew from television. To replace that source of funds, public television has mounted an intense and highly successful campaign both to increase the amount of funding available and to make the sources of that funding more secure. The resulting strategy has been a tripartite financial edifice, with money coming from government and foundations, private business and corporations and individual viewers. All three sources have had a profound effect on the development of public television, and although it is the vastly increased contributions from business and industry that have drawn most criticism, to examine those contributions alone would be a distortion.

The role of the federal government in public broadcasting has altered drastically in the last year. First, the amount of financing from the federal government has increased rapidly, from \$35 million in 1974 to \$103 million for 1977. This is expected to rise to \$107.5 million in 1978, and then jump to \$120.2 million in 1979. Second, long-range federal commitments have been made for the first time, so that funding is now planned in three-year cycles, and PBS officials hope soon to increase that to five-year cycles. The funding is channelled

through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) which, during the Nixon administration, was used as a tool to influence programming content on PBS. Although the blatant political manipulation of the Nixon era has been stopped, and although all PBS officials now state that the bureaucratic war between them and the CPB has ended, the system is still by no means immune from political interference. Board members of CPB are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, just like ambassadors, and the resulting calibre of men is not much different: a CPB board membership is still very much a political reward, and is often treated as a sinecure. Last winter, for example, President Ford nominated Joseph Coors, a wealthy brewery owner and heavy contributor to Republican campaigns and conservative causes. Because Coors had no media credentials, and because the political connection was so obvious, adverse publicity began to mount. Coors' nomination was narrowly defeated.

Of course, there is no government-funded television system which is entirely free from political influence; television in France, for example, or Sweden, is certainly subject to the penalties of governmental displeasure, even though autonomy is claimed. The solution envisioned by CPB and PBS is predicated on the fundamental political principle of having one's cake and eating it: that is, by returning once again to Montesquieu and a system of checks and balances. This is where the other two legs of the tripod, corporate and viewer support, come into play; the theory being that if public television can garner support from all three sources, no one source will become powerful enough to try to take control.

Who Pays?

Television in the United States is often described as being divided into two groups: the commercial (CBS, NBC, ABC) and the non-commercial (Public Broadcasting). This, however, is not entirely accurate. Obviously, for a medium to be transformed from a laboratory curiosity to a world-wide phenomenon in less than a generation (there are more homes in the U.S. with television sets than with indoor toilets), very powerful forces must be at work. As we have seen, similar technological advances that did not appeal to these forces quickly died out. And, just as clearly, the force that made television so pervasive a medium in the 50s and 60s was its power to sell goods: even at \$100,000 or more per minute, the cost per thousand consumers was lower, and the message more effective, than any other advertising medium.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the fact that advertising is by no means limited to the actual promotion of specific consumer products. Today, the usefulness of commercial television is becoming somewhat limited, particularly to certain groups of giant multi-national corporations. The plaint of 'lowest common denominator' has been hurled at commercial television since its inception, but it has always been directed at programme content: situation comedies, soap operas, police melodramas, etc. Reflection will show, however, that this

limitation applies to advertising content as well. Because of the high cost and totally diffuse market, television must limit its advertising to those products which are low in cost and used by large numbers of people. This is fine for deodorants, soaps, dog food and the like, but what about the corporation that manufactures computers, jet planes or word processing machines?

Obviously, television is the worst possible medium to reach the decision-maker who will allocate the necessary funds for the purchase of a copier, or a gas-metering system or a missile. But that does not mean that the companies making these products can ignore the general public or concentrate their advertising solely on the demographic area that concerns them. This is not simply a question of public relations, or of creating a cosy and positive public image. It is rather part of a carefully designed process whose purpose is to make the final decision by the ultimate consumer (a corporation executive, a Senator, even a President) as much of a foregone conclusion as possible. If the advertising campaign is successful, by the time the final decision is made it will no longer be momentous, but rather the final step of a continuous process; indeed, it will be not so much a decision as the ratification of an inevitable conclusion.

Then there are the advertising needs of those corporations whose last concern is the promotion of their products, but who are vitally interested in preserving a climate of opinion that will permit their continued operations with as little disruption as possible. Foremost in this group, of course, are the oil companies. Since the demand for petroleum products will always far exceed supply, oil companies no longer concern themselves with the promotion of specific additives, increased service or free gifts to attract customers. But this, in a sense, merely makes their mass communications programme much more difficult. To cite one example: the trans-Alaska pipeline, the most expensive (\$7.7 billion) non-military construction project in history, has just been completed and will begin supplying oil to America's West Coast in summer 1977. Unfortunately, it will supply much more oil than the West Coast can use, and—equally unfortunately—no adequate pipeline system exists to transport the oil to the midwest and east where it is needed. Therefore, the oil companies will most likely sell the surplus to Japan. That America's oil must be exported so that she can become even more dependent on Saudi Arabia is not something that every citizen will instantly comprehend as the wisest possible course. Therefore, the need for the oil companies to advertise is a question entirely separate from the relationship of supply and demand.

It is precisely in these areas that public television has proved so useful. Current regulations permit only a company's name to be announced and shown on the screen at the beginning and end of any programme it funds; no specifically commercial messages are allowed. But there are no limitations on the uses which a sponsoring company can make of its PBS programme on the commercial networks or in the print media. Thus, for example, Exxon regularly screened commercials for its drama series on the NBC Nightly News, and Arco Oil Company mounted a heavy print ad campaign to

promote *The Adams Chronicles*—and themselves. PBS, of course, encourages these campaigns, because they help promote PBS programmes at no cost to the network. Corporate support of cultural enterprises is nothing new, and at first glance it would appear that these contributions are merely an extension of the philanthropic tradition associated with men like Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford.

Closer examination will make it apparent, however, that a corporate purchase of a series like *Upstairs, Downstairs*, which is then re-packaged and broadcast over PBS, is a very different act with very different consequences from, for example, a contribution to a symphony orchestra or a museum. The support of such institutions, while undoubtedly carrying certain tax and public relations benefits, is essentially an act of philanthropy. Support of public television is an act of advertising, which happens to enjoy the legal and moral benefits of philanthropy. The public television audience, small by the standards of the commercial networks, is still huge, and it is demographically superb—wealthy, college-educated, consumer-oriented. It is, in short, a potent target for many companies, and that is precisely why it has become so popular.



'Upstairs, Downstairs', PBS's most successful import from the U.K.

If any further proof of the essentially commercial nature of public TV were needed, it can be seen in the very neat division between the types of corporate television expenditures: those companies most firmly committed to the production and sale of inexpensive consumer goods (Proctor & Gamble, Lever Brothers, General Foods, etc.) are the heaviest advertisers on the commercial networks, and the poorest contributors to public TV. Those corporations who need to advertise to a smaller but more select audience invariably support public TV, and they do so in direct proportion to their absence from the commercial networks. Mobil Oil Corporation made its enormous financial commitment to PBS at precisely the time it decided to abandon consumer-oriented advertising on the commercial networks. Before the consolidation of PBS, the way in which a corporation reached that kind of audience was to purchase a high-quality programme, like a Royal Shakespeare Company production, and run it on a commercial network as a 'special'. Here, too, even though advertising is allowed, it is generally kept to a minimum, and the ads themselves are much more tasteful and less annoying than an ordinary spot for hair spray. Obviously,

to run hair spray ads every ten minutes during *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be counter-productive—not because of the violence done to Shakespeare, but because it wouldn't sell any hair spray.

So, then, public TV is commercial TV—albeit of a slightly different kind. Is there anything wrong with a television organisation like PBS getting some, or even a great deal, of its financing from private corporations? Not necessarily. There is, however, a great deal wrong with the Orwellian contortions to which they have reverted in order to maintain the fiction of their non-commercial autonomy. Most dangerous (and offensive) is their refusal to admit that they are commercially supported at all. No programmes on PBS are ever sponsored by anyone; they are always made possible by 'grants'. That Mobil, Exxon, IBM and the rest have reaped enormous benefits from their association with public broadcasting is undeniable; why then should they be exempt from the obligations of commercial advertisers? By maintaining the fiction of 'grants', these companies can deduct their expenditure as philanthropy, reduce their taxes, and enjoy an abnormal (and unfair) advantage over those companies whose advertising needs lie with the mass audience of the commercial networks. The whole process is made totally absurd by the quaint practice of hiring an announcer with a phony Mayfair accent to declaim the portentous fact of Mobil's financial contribution. Does Mobil, in fact, really wish us to believe that it is a British firm? What goal can this perversion of Anglophilia possibly serve?

Like all sponsoring organisations, private companies exert some influence over programme content as well. Two seasons ago, for example, PBS ran a series called *The Way It Was*, featuring film clips from famous sports contests of the past. Production credits advised that the show was conceived and produced by Herb Schmetz. Mr. Schmetz is a vice-president of Mobil Oil. By itself, this incident means little. But the continuing possibility of helpful outsiders giving friendly advice to the hopelessly understaffed, underbudgeted and inexperienced public affairs sector of PBS can never be discounted.

The final major factor concerning corporate sponsorship of public TV is the almost total lack of risk involved. The situation comedies and police shoot-ups of the big networks may well be frightful, but they are also frightfully expensive, and the mortality rate among them is appalling—perhaps one show out of four will survive its first season. None of these risks need be taken in the sponsorship of a public TV programme. The most popular way of avoiding risk has been simply to purchase a series outright from the BBC or another foreign organisation. That way, one is buying a finished product and can see in advance precisely what one is getting—all the production risks have been absorbed by someone else. This method became so popular that it eventually led to an uproar about the absurdly disproportionate amount of British programming on public TV, and so a second method is coming into increasing use: to share sponsorship of domestically produced programmes with one or a number of charitable foundations, or with the

federal government. The mastodonic *Adams Chronicles* can be cited as a case in point. Produced with money from a national endowment, a major private trust fund and the Atlantic Richfield Oil Company, this thirteen-part programme has stimulated the ad-writers at PBS into an unprecedented orgy of superlatives. Other reviewers, as well as historians, have by now well documented the manifest shortcomings of the series. We can be certain, however, that this will have little impact on the intense satisfaction with which PBS regards this, its most expensive super-production.

The banality and pompousness of *The Adams Chronicles* should come as no surprise, given the circumstances of its inception and the process of its creation. Obviously, many hands will touch a programme before it goes into production, and therefore a broad consensus must be established for any new material to be considered. The formulas for domestically produced PBS programmes may not be as inane as those enforced on the commercial networks, but in their own way they are just as rigid.

TV's Private Public

The final element of public television support comes from the viewing public. Even though this is by far the smallest source in terms of funds generated, it is also the broadest and most visible, and deserves special notice. The budget of a single station—WGBH in Boston—can serve as an example. Out of a 1975 operating budget of \$13,743,360, less than three million dollars came from viewer contributions. The proportions remain more or less constant throughout the network. And yet the PBS stations devote a tremendous amount of time and resources to persuading viewers to send \$15 or \$25 to the station. Is this effort disproportionate to net results? That depends on how one defines those results.

If the object were simply to generate income, it would clearly be a questionable exercise. Most major public stations have fund-raising weeks at least four times a year, plus a full-week auction, plus special newspaper and magazine ads. To spend \$150,000 organising an auction that will net perhaps \$600,000 is undoubtedly profitable, but hardly overwhelmingly so. Therefore, although viewer sponsorship certainly contributes to the station's income, I do not believe the primary reason for the great emphasis placed on this form of fund-raising is financial. Two other important factors are involved. The first is that funds for PBS are often interdependent; grant and federal monies are, to an extent, based on levels of viewer contributions. (One common method is for the government to add about forty cents to every dollar contributed by individuals.) The second reason is psychological; and, I believe, indicative of a new dimension which public broadcasting has created.

PBS, like every other television network in the world, is a highly centralised, tightly structured and hierarchical information system. Television has redefined the meaning of 'freedom of the press', because there is no analogous 'freedom of the air': all transmissions are monitored, controlled and licensed by the federal government. There is

no other communications system which is so highly centralised, no other in which access is so limited and difficult to obtain. This is inherent in the nature of broadcast television, and is equally true for private or state systems, commercial or non-commercial. The degree of variation and specialisation among the press, while perhaps not as great as fifty years ago, is still enormous compared with the options facing a television viewer. Perhaps precisely for that reason, it has become a vital and central part of public broadcasting's philosophy to speak of 'community needs', to debate the nature of its mandate, and—most of all—to promote itself as an integral member of the community it serves.

It does this, first, in the nature of its programming content. No other medium is as firmly committed to the verities of 'something for everyone' as Public TV: one programme on modern dance, two for blacks, four dramas, a financial report, and so on. But it does so even more in the relationship it attempts to forge with its viewers, a relationship which transcends the ostensible content being projected. For public television to survive in the political and economic climate of America today, it must transform its viewers into an active constituency. Naturally, this implies programming that will meet with the approval of a substantial number of influential people in the community, but this is only the first step. Programme approval, while a prerequisite for everything else, is not enough. Precisely because public TV is a commercial medium, and a highly effective one, it is necessary to create a strong sense of viewer participation and identification with the station. And it is this psychological bond, more than the money, which makes viewer sponsorship such a vital part of the recent growth of PBS.

The purpose of an auction is not to raise \$600,000, but to create the psychological climate that will make the contribution of \$6 million by corporations and foundations an inevitability; the one is dependent on the other. And it is precisely in this area that the new breed of business-oriented managers—men like John Jay Iselin of New York or Michael Rice of Boston—have been so effective. They have taken the poverty-stricken cultural institution of 'educational' television and transformed it into a sleek and powerful communications medium. To precisely the degree that public television has become centralised, powerful and remote, they have bound their viewers to it and created a whole new dimension of institutional loyalty.

Hundreds of thousands of viewers all over the country send in contributions to buy a 'membership' in a service they can get free just by switching on their sets. The week-long auctions, which began in Boston in 1966 and have spread to almost every major PBS outlet in the country, generate intense viewer involvement. Not only do hundreds of area merchants donate goods and services—sometimes very expensive goods and services—which are then bid for by station watchers, but a huge corps of volunteers competes for the privilege of manning phones and writing orders. Obviously, these emotions could not be mobilised if station managements were not able to convince relatively large numbers of people

that this is where their energies should be placed. My point is that the various fund-raising devices used by the Public Broadcasting Service clearly tap into viewer needs which go beyond—indeed, have nothing to do with—the actual programme offerings of the network. During the auction at New York's WNET last year, one viewer bid a thousand dollars simply for the right to present the next item for bidding.

While the new breed of managers deserves credit for a superbly effective programme of harnessing and capitalising on viewer response, this response must be kept in proper perspective. To begin with, it has nothing to do with television, or indeed any aspect of the communications potential which these managers control. But that, after all, is only to be expected: Iselin, Rice and the others treat television as they do because they cannot conceive of any other way to treat it. But even on their terms, it is difficult to see the current growth continuing for long before some serious strains begin to mar the surface of their machine. In terms of viewer response, the current practice of sacrificing massive amounts of air-time to the exhortation (indeed, nagging) of viewers must soon become counter-productive. Viewers will begin to resent the constant intrusion on their viewing time and the tone of injured piety with which station staff demand funds; and perhaps even the stations themselves will come to recognise the increasing futility of these methods. As the audience becomes more valuable to the sponsors, so will the time. And people accustomed to measuring time at \$100,000 a minute cannot forever cling to the archaic devices of pep rallies, call-ins and the offers of umbrellas and T-shirts in exchange for a pledge. Larger numbers of corporations will come to realise what some of the clever ones already know: that public TV is one of the best buys on the market today. As that happens, the commercial networks will no longer be able to maintain their complacent air of protective benevolence. The atmosphere will become a bit more competitive.

There are some who believe that the growth of the Public Broadcasting Service heralds the start of an autonomous, independent and strong alternative communications system, an Americanised version of the BBC. But there is no evidence to support this view. The BBC is structured as an integral organisation, and its independence is a function of its financing. Public Broadcasting in the U.S.A. is not so much a structure as a process. It is composed of shifting factions, supremacy among which is largely a question of personalities and leadership, and thus subject to almost constant change. To its supporters, Public Broadcasting offers high quality entertainment and clever instruction to an increasingly large and satisfied audience. To its detractors, PBS is little more than an instrument and a tool of the bureaucracies, corporations and power blocs that control it: a *putain de luxe*.

But in either case, the Public Broadcasting Service is an integral part of the structure of commercial broadcasting in America, a structure that extends from the network boardrooms down to the smallest FM radio station. Not to see it in those terms is not to see it at all.



'Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne'

Burel & Bresson

Interview by Rui Nogueira, translation and introduction by Tom Milne

Starting out as an apprentice photographer after studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Léonce-Henry Burel, the Cameraman with the White Gloves—a trademark initially adopted as a protection against a slight haemophilic condition—entered the cinema in 1912. Rapidly graduating out of the darkroom, he made (as director/cameraman) a number of pseudo-scientific documentaries distributed under the auspices of the celebrated Dr. Comandon, simultaneously learning how to direct actors on a series of comedies featuring a character called Zizi.

In 1915 Burel was invited to join the prestigious Film d'Art company as a cameraman, and the first director he was assigned to was Abel Gance. Although Burel no longer remembers the title of the film (and denies having worked on *La Folie du Docteur Tube*, usually cited as the beginning), their association was long and fruitful, continuing through Gance's most creative period (*Les Gaz Mortels*, *La Zone de la Mort*, *Mater Dolorosa*, *La Dixième Symphonie*, *J'accuse*, *La Roue*, *Napoléon*) and ending with the final flourish of *La Vénus Aveugle* in 1941.

In between times Burel spent four years with Jacques Feyder (*Crainquebille*, *Visages d'Enfants*, *L'Image*, etc.). And by the end of the silent era the list of directors with whom he had been associated begins to sound like a roll call of the most interesting talents working in France: Maurice Tourneur, Léonce Perret, L'Herbier, Tourjansky, Volkoff, Rex Ingram. The sound period, however, tells a rather different story. Scrabbling hopefully through a long catalogue of

forgotten men and hack directors, the best one can up with for twenty years is Duvivier, Delannoy, Decoin, Gréville.

Burel, born in 1892 ('Hélas!'), and by conviction an old-school anarchist (cf. his opinion of *Pickpocket*), would probably go along with this division of his career into two uneven parts: 'Time was when the cameraman really was the director's alter ego. They were inseparable, dependent on each other, trusting each other completely. Crews were

small, and although the director was the boss you made the film together, really just the two of you, discussing everything, seeing what you could and what you couldn't do. And the cameraman was in total charge of his camera.'

'Things began to change even before sound came in. I remember asking Gance for an assistant, on *La Zone de la Mort* I think, because the equipment was too heavy for me to carry; and this assistant took over some of my other duties as well, loading, doing stills, and so on. But it was with sound and then colour that the changes really came. Crews grew ever larger, with all sorts of electricians and technicians and assistants to assistants. The cameraman became . . . not exactly secondary, but merely one element among many; and the operator was now closer to the director than he was.'

'I really loved my profession because you had everything to do, everything to discover. Nowadays everything has to be safe. They don't take risks any more. They never fail. But a great cameraman, to my mind, has the right to be wrong. And a great director is one who lets you try for things. Feyder was like that; for me he was the greatest. Gance

was like that as well (although he had a little too much violin and double-bass in his range of effects for my taste). And Bresson . . . he was the last of the species.'

For in 1950, in fact, aged fifty-eight, Burel again took up the voyage of discovery interrupted twenty years previously, and pursued it through four consecutive Bresson films. After his disappointment with *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* ('I would have liked to finish on a note of beauty'), Burel did in fact go back to filming: *Chair de Poule* (Duvivier, 1963), *Un Drôle de Paroissien* (Mocky, 1963), *Le Dernier Tiercé* (Pottier, 1964), *Les Compagnons de la Marguerite* (Mocky, 1966).

L. H. BUREL: One day while I was at my villa in Cap Ferrat, I received a telephone call from a producer at U.G.C., a very nice man with whom I'd worked several times, asking if I'd come to Paris to test for a film. 'Test?' I said, 'An old dog like me with a hundred films behind him? You can't be serious.' But he explained what a predicament he was in, with a director who was going to make an extraordinary film and who wanted something extraordinary but couldn't explain exactly what. 'I've suggested all your most distinguished colleagues, and none of them is what he wants. So please come, as a personal favour to me. I'll pay your expenses, and if nothing comes of it I'll pay you anything you like. Just come, so that I can say I've done my best.'

In the circumstances I said yes and caught the first train to Paris. The director was Robert Bresson, who was preparing *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* for U.G.C. and had apparently been making tests with everybody: Matras, Lefèvre, Thirard. Not the usual tests of a hundred feet or so, but real Bresson tests, a thousand feet long. And each time he said, 'No, no, that's not how I see it.' So it really was as a last resource that the producer had telephoned me. I met Bresson the night I arrived in Paris, and he said, 'I'm going to show you something, my dear Burel. It isn't what I want, but it is something like it. Or at least, it may give you some idea . . .' and so on and so forth. Then he took me to see Carol Reed's *The Third Man*. I thought it was awful—I don't like that kind of photography—and I said to Bresson, 'Listen, if that's the kind of photography you want, then I'm not the man to give it to you. I don't like that high contrast style, with no half-tones and no detail. Perhaps I could do it for you, but it would give me no pleasure and I wouldn't do it well.'

I rather regretted turning it down, because I had just decided to reduce my activities to one film a year, preferably an interesting one, and this was interesting from every point of view. Even at that time working with Bresson was quite something, U.G.C. was a good company to work for, and since I was arriving on the scene as a saviour, I could dictate conditions. The film also had a generous budget and a lengthy schedule (as a matter of fact it turned out to be the only Bresson film that *did* have a long schedule). Nevertheless I did turn it down. Bresson, however, said that since I was there we might as well do some tests.

I read the script that night. The next day, when Bresson asked me what kind of lens I was going to use, I said I was thinking of

50 mm. It doesn't give you much depth, which he evidently didn't want anyway, and it concentrates the action. I also told him I would use relatively powerful diffusers in order to get the extreme contrasts he liked. Now, I had brought along my own diffusers which were made specially for me and which were in effect cylindrical additional lenses. We shot various tests using 50 and 75 mm lenses. But the man who was acting as my assistant wasn't used to these diffusers and he must have changed them while changing lenses, getting them on back to front. When I saw the rushes I was appalled; it wasn't diffused, it was out of focus. At which point Bresson came rushing up excitedly, saying, 'That's it! You've got it, my dear Burel. That's exactly what I want for my film.' So much for *The Third Man* and the high contrast stuff!

He immediately wanted to have me signed up, but I wasn't having any. I like diffused effects and I don't like high definition, but I wasn't going to make a film that was to be entirely out of focus. However, we lunched, we talked, we looked at those rushes over and over again. Finally he said that perhaps we could compromise, meet each other halfway over what he wanted and what I refused to do. I agreed, provided I was given the freedom to do what I liked. I always have done what I liked, even when I hadn't a penny, and now that I didn't *have* to earn my living I didn't see why I should do something I would hate. 'I'll let you do what you like and I won't say a word,' he said, 'only do give me something like those rushes . . .'

So I shot the whole film with a 50 mm lens, and in addition to the diffuser, used a very light gauze. But since Bresson was making demands on me, I also made demands on him. I told him I saw the film entirely without luminous contrasts, as something rather insubstantial or immaterial which I wanted to handle without any suggestion of shadows. All right, he said, but how? Since he had the budget to do it, and since there usually isn't much sun in the north anyway (the film was shot on location in the Pas-de-Calais), I suggested that we should shoot without the sun, doing the exact opposite of what everybody usually does and shooting indoors whenever the sun did come out. That way I thought we could give the film a texture, a style, an entirely new feel.

So off we went and spent nearly two months getting up before dawn—agony for me as I have always been a night person—to do up to thirty retakes of the priest setting off to join his flock and so forth. All the scenes inside the church were done in the local church at Hesdin. It was still consecrated, with Mass being said there every Sunday, and every time the crew passed in front of the altar while setting up a scene they would bare their heads. Some of them even genuflected, and the work just wasn't getting done quickly enough until I spoke to the abbé who had been assigned as adviser to ensure that Bresson didn't commit any blunders or heresies. He saw my point that it had to be either a church or a studio, and promptly settled the matter by removing the Holy Sacrament from the altar. After that the crew came, went and swore as usual.

I must say that Bresson was marvellous about my idea of shooting without sun. Despite all the money that had been spent on tests—you can imagine the costs in raw

stock and laboratory charges when tests are counted not in feet but in miles, when every take that might be possible must be printed up, and when he is so demanding about finding exactly what he wants—we simply set off and shot for a week without seeing any rushes whatsoever (chiefly because the local cinema had no facilities for double-headed projection, and Bresson wanted to hear the soundtrack as well as see the images). It didn't bother me, because after doing those tests I knew exactly how much diffusion I needed. But when we finally did see the first week's rushes—not much definition, but it was bearable—there was Bresson on one side of me saying, 'Yes, my dear Burel, but it isn't . . . you know . . . it's very fine and I'm very pleased, but . . . it isn't at all what we agreed on.' And on the other there was the production company saying, 'But my dear Burel, what on earth are we going to do with that? We couldn't possibly show that in a cinema.'

U.G.C. were so worried that they sent down a technical adviser—a cameraman who had made something of a name with UFA but hadn't been in work much recently . . . need I say more?—who echoed the predictions of catastrophe and ruin. Finally I said that I was going to do the film the way I wanted or I wasn't going to do it at all. And since I hadn't signed a contract—I've never signed a contract in my life—and U.G.C. were tearing their hair with visions of starting again from scratch, they gave in. So the film was completed in those conditions, with nobody agreeing about anything and even the laboratory people getting into the act and trying to correct the contrast in developing. It was awful. The result? The film was awarded the Grand Prix for photography at the Venice Festival. After that I was a god for U.G.C. Only Bresson still had reservations. A few. But he was very proud because he got a Grand Prix as well.

If you watch the film carefully, by the way, you will notice three or four occasions where the camera is outside, moving in to a closed window which opens. It looks simple enough to do but it isn't, because the camera and crew (not to mention any light you have to use) get reflected in the glass. I fiddled and experimented endlessly to get the effect. I had to, because that was what Bresson wanted. Every time he asked me to do something difficult he would simply say sweetly, 'But my dear Burel, if you can't do it then I can't make the film.' How I sweated!

For me, *Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé* (1956) is by far the best thing Bresson has done. It's a masterpiece and it proved that he was one of the really great French directors, on a par—although all three are very different—with Feyder and Gance. And coming from me that's no small praise, believe me. Furthermore the film is a challenge, it throws down the gauntlet. To start by saying this man had escaped and I am going to tell you how, and then to do so entirely without artifice or dramatic effects, in absolute simplicity . . . well, that is mastery.

The filming caused me a lot of headaches for a very simple reason. Which was that many scenes had to be shot in studio sets, and these same scenes would begin or end in the real setting of the prison at Lyon. My problem was to ensure that the spectator could never say this bit was shot in a studio

set, and that bit in the Montluc prison. But that's my job, and I did it by studying the lighting in the cells at Montluc, then repeating the light exactly in the studio. The scenes done at Montluc were the ones in which the prisoner came out of his cell into the gallery; there had to be a correlation between the cell and the much more brightly illuminated corridor, and the cell itself had to be lit to match exactly the one I had lit in the studio.

I had to be extremely careful, too, because photographically speaking, I was living dangerously by filming almost without light. When you are working within a comfortable range, a little more or a little less doesn't really matter; but when you're stuck at one end of the scale, then the slightest error can mean catastrophe. For the scenes with Fontaine and Jost in their cell, which is illuminated only by a fanlight, it would have been ridiculous to show them with shadows, especially as the fanlight is right above them. As you don't actually see it until later, I wanted to suggest that the whole cell was illuminated by this fanlight you hadn't seen but which you would know was there. So I think I was one of the first cameramen to use reflected instead of direct light. I threw the light on to a sort of large white shield, so that instead of falling directly on the actors it was reflected on to them. It became an ambience, an atmosphere, and though directed, came not from a particular point but from an extensive surface. It was easy enough really because Bresson works so much in close-up and because there were never more than three actors in shot. With a big set or a wider field, I could never have done it.

When Fontaine comes out into the corridor, on the other hand, I used directional light to suggest illumination from much larger windows. Nothing was left to chance. The escape scenes were shot at Montluc at the dead of night and I used an absolute minimum of light. Sometimes there's a bit of light and you can just barely see the two of them; but since there was almost nothing else on the screen, you knew they were there.

With *Pickpocket* (1959) the problem was different. Bresson wanted to film in the streets, as far as possible without anybody noticing. Whole sequences of the film, not just a few scenes. It would be easier now, but I had an idea I'm quite proud of. The first high-power lamps, which could be over-run to 2,800-3,000 watts, had just become available in France. In order to be able to use them, I hid car batteries to make up the 110 volts on a little camouflaged cart. After Bresson had rehearsed ten, fifteen, twenty times, my operator came along during the final rehearsal with his camera—we were using a hand camera, an Arriflex—to check his focus and get a good look at the location and action. Then, as the take started, I switched on the lights I had previously hidden in trees or places like that where people wouldn't notice them. So, using the fastest available Gevaert stock, we were able to film almost candid camera style, because people didn't have time to realise what was going on. That way we got scenes around the Madeleine and the Opéra, the café in the Place Pigalle (part interior and part exterior, which was a problem), and the one at the corner of the Boulevard Saint Michel.

For the Gare de Lyon sequence, which



'Pickpocket': Martin Lassalle, Marika Green

was rather more complex, I was able to light practically a whole street by running off the circuits in the local bars and cafés; I would signal with a torch and the lights would all be switched on at once. This was the sequence that was a sort of documentary of ways of picking pockets, and the 'technical adviser' had been a professional pickpocket, fantastically clever with his hands. As the filming was rather more complicated than usual, we had been given four or five gendarmes to help. At the technical adviser's invitation, these cops went to a bar to have a drink with him after we had finished—and there he gave them back the keys, wallets and watches he had lifted from them while they were going about their business during filming! Afterwards, being too well known to resume his profession, he went on the halls with a marvellous act.

Including rehearsals which went on for hours and hours, *Pickpocket* was shot in barely seven weeks. I wasn't at all in agreement with Bresson about the film because I didn't care for the way he turned his hero into a lousy little swine (even if he did love his mother). The character is basically a rebel, after all, something of an anarchist, and yet Bresson has him steal only from ordinary people, with never a hint of elegance or altruism to offset the ugliness. I didn't understand what he was trying to say. As a matter of fact, I don't think anybody ever has understood, really. Who is this 'pickpocket', why does he steal, and so on?

'Procès de Jeanne d'Arc': Florence Carrel.
'Bresson would never let her look up ...'



What Bresson did was his business and I didn't interfere, but we used to have long discussions about the film before starting and I made this point over and over again. But unlike Feyder when we had a disagreement about ideas or camera angles (sometimes he would give way and sometimes I would), Bresson wouldn't listen and it never made any difference. He just goes ahead with what he has in mind.

I don't really want to talk about *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (1961) because I think it's an entirely botched film. I'd rather forget it. And I think Bresson might prefer to forget it too...

My wife, who died a few years later, was already gravely ill and I had really decided not to make any more films. But Bresson wrote to me, very flattering letters, and in the end I agreed. My reasoning was as follows: Bresson, after all, is a very religious man, a sincere believer; he doesn't say so in so many words, but I know he is because we have discussed these things. I'm not a believer myself but I respect sincere beliefs; and as he really wants to make this film, it is going to be marvellous. Joan of Arc as seen by a very talented, very intelligent man who sincerely believes: we can make a great film together, *Un Condamné à Mort* all over again but seen from a different angle.

Bresson's art director, Charbonnier, had found a wonderful natural setting for the film under the observatory at Meudon. Charbonnier, incidentally, is a very nice man and a very talented painter even though I don't understand his talent. We get on well, but we don't talk the same language. It's like Picasso: I just don't understand, and it's neither his fault nor mine. Anyway, these vaults he had found, huge and full of nooks and angles, were absolutely perfect as a medieval décor. I rubbed my hands, thinking what a joy it was going to be. We tested about a dozen girls, all of them very pretty, and Bresson chose one with great possibilities. Charming, absolutely right for the Maid, and with eyes that were extraordinarily intelligent, limpid and pure.

Then we started. And he didn't use the setting at all. He stuck me in front of a wall covered with cloth hangings to represent the tribunal where most of the action takes place. And bang up against the hangings—and on a little dais to boot—were the judges. You'd have thought it was a church pageant or something. I said to him, 'Robert, why haven't you left me anything behind so I can convey the feeling that we're in an enormous room? What do you expect me to do with this?' 'Ah,' he said, 'But you see I want it to be simple and spare. I don't want anything to distract the eye.' That was our first disagreement.

Next we simply turned everything round, still with that wretched dais, and shot the girl. You never saw Joan and her judges together, not once. No interrelation. For me this is Bresson's kippered herring; you get a nice clean set of bones but nothing to eat around them. I saw it very differently, and quite honestly I think I could have done something with it. Second disagreement.

Our third disagreement had me curled up into a ball and showing my prickles, because it concerned me professionally. Here we had this sweet, simple, charming girl with the most marvellous, beautiful eyes,



Bresson filming in 1966

and Bresson would never let her look up at the camera. Never. She always had to look down, even when she was answering her judges. I told Bresson that if I believed in God, which I don't, I would look up when I thought of Him. If I believed, He wouldn't be beneath me but above me. Yet here Bresson was making Joan behave like a shifty hypocrite. And it wasn't even a sign of humility in her, because Joan was not humble or humbled. She was a mystic, a visionary . . . you have to be to lead soldiers into battle without even knowing how to use a sword. I was so furious I really let myself go, and Bresson didn't like it. He didn't want to have Joan look up because Dreyer had done that.

Anyway, that was our great quarrel, and since Bresson will never admit his mistakes—as he is perfectly entitled not to—he held it against me. I had humiliated him, so he wanted to humiliate me. That, however, isn't easy to do. In fact it is probably impossible. I'm an arrogant man; not vain but arrogant, terribly arrogant. That's the way I was born, that's the way I'll probably die, and there's nothing to be done about it. On two or three occasions he found fault with the way I was lighting things. The first time I thought, well, maybe he's right; it was an arguable point. The second time I said, 'But it won't match with what we've already done.' And the third time I told him he had a week to find a replacement for me. 'But why, my dear Burel?'

'Because you're making a mess of your film. Because I expected so much more of you. Because working on it no longer gives me any pleasure. It's the last film I'll ever work on, and I would have liked to finish on a note of beauty. I'll never forgive you for not letting me have that girl's eyes. I could have given you a face of ecstasy, a face that audiences would treasure in their memories.'

Men with writs coming to the set, endless special delivery letters from Bresson and from the producer Agnès Delahaye, pointing out that although as usual I had not signed a contract, I had made a verbal agreement. So I stayed and finished the film after writing a letter to 'Dear M. Bresson' (no more Robert) explaining that I didn't want to run the film or the company into any more trouble, and that I would complete it on two conditions. One, that no scene was to be shot until his formal approval had been recorded on the clapperboard. Two, that I would attend screenings of rushes only in working hours. And that was how we finished the film. I left him alone and he left me alone.

Bressonisms

Bresson's book *Notes sur le Cinématographe* was published in Paris in 1975. A series of aphoristic paragraphs, with that characteristic quality of seeming at once definitive and tentative, it distinguishes between *cinématographe* (the real thing) and *cinéma* (films

still linked to the stage, the actor). In January 1977 Urizen Press, New York, is bringing out an English edition, to be distributed in Britain by Pluto Press. We are grateful to the publishers and to Robert Bresson for permission to print these extracts.

Metteur-en-scène, director. The point is not to direct someone, but to direct oneself.

□

An image must be transformed by contact with other images, as is a colour by contact with other colours. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation.

□

If an image, looked at by itself, expresses something sharply, if it involves an interpretation, it will not be transformed on contact with other images. The other images will have no power over it, and it will have no power over the other images. Neither action, nor reaction. It is definitive and unusable in the cinematographer's system. (A system does not regulate everything. It is a bait for something.)

□

The mixture of true and false yields falsity (photographed theatre or CINEMA). The false when it is homogeneous can yield truth (theatre).

□

In a mixture of true and false, the true brings out the false, the false hinders belief in the true. An actor simulating fear of shipwreck on the deck of a real ship battered by a real storm—we believe neither in the actor, nor in the ship, nor in the storm.

□

To set up a film is to bind persons to each other and to objects by looks.

□

Shooting. Put oneself into a state of intense ignorance and curiosity, and yet see things *in advance*.

□

Be sure of having used to the full all that is communicated by immobility and silence.

□

One forgets too easily the difference between a man and his image, and that there is none between the sound of his voice on the screen and in real life.

□

A sound must never come to the help of an image, nor an image to the help of a sound.

□

Actors. The nearer they approach (on the screen) with their *expressiveness*, the further away they get. Houses, trees come nearer; the actors go away.

Models. No ostentation. Faculty of gathering into himself, of keeping, of not letting anything get out. A certain inward configuration common to them all. Eyes.

□

Avoid paroxysms (anger, terror, etc.) which one is obliged to simulate, and in which everybody is alike.

□

Flatten my images (as if ironing them) *without attenuating them*.

□

How hide from oneself the fact that it all winds up on a rectangle of white fabric hung on a wall? (See your film as a surface to cover.)

□

Hide the ideas, but so that people find them. The most important will be the most hidden.

□

IN THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGES, ONE MUST LOSE COMPLETELY THE NOTION OF IMAGE. THE IMAGES MUST EXCLUDE THE IDEA OF IMAGE.

□

The eye (in general) superficial, the ear profound and inventive. A locomotive's whistle imprints on us a whole railroad station.

□

Your camera passes through faces, provided no mimicry (intentional or not intentional) gets in between. Cinematographic films made of inner movements *which are seen*.

□

Obvious *travelling* or *panning* shots do not correspond to the movements of the eye. This is to separate the eye from the body. (One should not use the camera as if it were a broom.)

□

Shooting. No part of the unexpected which is not secretly expected by you.

□

Films whose slownesses and silences are indistinguishable from the slownesses and silences of the audience are ruled out.

□

Accustom the public to divining the whole of which they are given only a part. Make people diviners. Make them desire it.

□

The things we bring off by chance—what power they have!



CLOCKWORK VIOLENCE

Ken Moskowitz



'You don't stop being concerned with man because you recognise his essential absurdities and frailties and pretensions... In *Strangelove* I was dealing with the inherent irrationality in man that threatens to destroy him; that irrationality is with us as strongly today, and must be conquered. But a recognition of insanity doesn't imply a celebration of it—nor a sense of despair and futility about the possibility of curing.' Stanley Kubrick in *Playboy* interview (1968).

Since he created *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, Stanley Kubrick has been showing off. That film overwhelmed critics and buffs with its technical virtuosity. Science fiction movies were no longer something to be haughtily dismissed. In place of cardboard sets, pompous spaceship commanders and formula plots was a philosophical vision of the cosmos which bewildered, enthralled and exhilarated.

In 1971, *A Clockwork Orange* presented a similar fantastic society of the near future, but from a different perspective. This time, the story unfolds on the earth's surface, and its relation to the preceding movie is croaked by a tramp in the film's first line of dialogue: 'Men on the moon, and men spinning around the earth, and there's not no attention paid to earthly law and order no more.' While the ripe technology pampers composed, cool-headed astronauts, it fails to quell young Alex, a seeming troglodyte from the primeval age that opened *2001*, who terrorises society on earth.

Barry Lyndon (1975) is historical fiction set in neo-classical Europe, the age which built rooms like the human zoo bed-chamber at the end of *2001*. This sedate, static world of social classes, propriety and conservatism lasted from the 1760s until the explosion of the French Revolution in 1789, which is the date on the money order which Lady Lyndon signs in the movie's last scene. As before, the technical perfection is salient in crisp focus, carefully composed images and consistent visual beauty. Again, there was a chorus of viewers who admired the succession of pretty pictures but voiced their confusion or hostility. What does it all mean? Is the story of the rise and fall of an Irish rake really worth three hours of our attention, accustomed as we are to super highways and half-hour television shows?

It is the argument of this article that the three films constitute a coherent imaginative vision which supersedes their *prima facie* diversity of setting, characters and ideas. Even a casual analysis, to be sure, would reveal their stylistic harmony in grandness of scale, in ambitiousness, in technical perfection, in harsh use of natural lighting, and in their clinical, detached view of ugly, impassive, or downright cruel human beings.

Though Kubrick's interests in these films initially seem diffuse, a closer look yields a contrast of disordered human energy, usually violent, to social forces that build a structure or organisation upon this slippery foundation and seek to deny, disguise or repress it by formalising or rationalising it in some

Forms of aggression. Top and left: 'Barry Lyndon'; centre: the opening sequence of 'A Clockwork Orange'

way. In 2001, the appearance of the proto-human apes intrudes upon and disturbs the ballet-of-the-cosmos mood which opens the film. In each of the chapters of 2001 there is a harmony or integration of images and music as planets, spaceships or weightless humans waltz to the beat of unified cosmic order. In the first part, the emotionalism and power-plays of the apes destroy this tranquil equilibrium. In the third part, a highly organised technological society has developed, but the elemental violence and aggression of the cerebral, phlegmatic man surfaces in his glorious creation, a smug computer named HAL. This future society complacently trains level-headed, unemotional astronauts, expecting their space flight to proceed with unerring precision and certitude. Their facile assumption that irrational violence has been conquered is belied by the struggle of man versus computer, which is a sublimated form of the apes' battle for the water hole.

The totalitarian government of *Clockwork Orange* acts with the same insensitivity to man's violent genesis and history. In this earthly analogue to 2001's outer space story, the Christian (represented by the priest), the social or liberal (represented by the social worker, Mr. Deltoid), and the behaviourist (mental conditioning) reactions to violence all fail to suppress it. Though Alex is conditioned to act with as much clockwork predictability as the astronauts, violent human nature confounds his government's best-laid plans. At the movie's end, the Minister talks of co-opting Alex into a state sinecure, just as the brutal droogs were earlier hired by the police.

In *Barry Lyndon*, society never attempts to abolish violence, but rather harnesses or channels it as at the end of *Clockwork Orange*. This neo-classical world regimented human behaviour with rigid conventions. The age embraced the classical ideals of restraint and balance, which resulted in the formalism of stilted speech and music meant to soothe and relax the listener. The age took a sensible, civilised approach to man's violent instincts. The volatile passions were released in tense, ritualistic duels, which are the ceremonies which frame *Barry Lyndon*. The duel is an excellent symbol of violence encased in unnecessary form: an elaborate ritual of jargon and manners and decorum is required to effect a simple act of murder or revenge or pride.

In each of these movies, Kubrick presents the formalisation of fundamental human aggression. There is always a contrast of boisterous, frenetic violence—the apes' battle, Alex's beatings, Barry's assault on Lord Bullingdon—and a tense refinement and rarification of this violence—the power struggle of astronauts and computer, the government's subjugation of Alex, the duel. These latter conflicts are socially or politically sanctioned embellishments of the more straightforward violence of primordial man. This modern, respectable violence is quieter and cleaner; an outsider might not even realise that there's a conflict. It's all superficially so well-mannered and civilised that though people may lose their lives, they never lose their composure.

Because the construction of layers of form on to a violent human core isn't immediately apparent in these movies, one might ask how aware Kubrick is of the unity of his artistic

vision in these films. In fact, some critics point to the vagueness and ambiguity of 2001, and attribute its great suggestiveness or resonance to an inchoate, unclear, hence confused vision. However, in the seemingly insignificant details of this movie there is evidence of a sure imagination. Kubrick possibly didn't think about the thematic consequences of showing a stewardess watching a judo match on television, nor did he ponder why Dave Bowman should be shadow boxing as he jogs around the spaceship when we first spot him. He must have had a feeling that somehow this type of studied, scientific or stylised combat made sense, and what counts is that his hunches or even unconscious feelings are ingenious because they are right on target. Two films later, judo will be replaced by swordplay, and shadow boxing by a real fist fight. All these examples evince the coherence and comprehensiveness of Kubrick's feeling that primitive aggression is the source of many diverse human activities.

Stanley Kubrick's cinematic style is an immediate, non-verbal indication of his contrast of violence and the tenuous layers of formality and order constructed upon it. In most of his violent scenes, Kubrick shoots with a handheld camera, in strong contrast to the very posed, formal, moving-painting quality of the balance of the movies. The 'Dawn of Man' sequence in 2001 isn't shot with a handheld camera, but there is a moving camera used to shoot the apes to distinguish their realm from the artfully composed still shots of the earth and heavens which began the movie. Later, the climactic struggle of Dave Bowman, as he enters an emergency hatch and dismantles the computer, is partly shot with handheld camera.

Uses of the handheld camera in the other films are the attack on the writer and his wife, and the fight with the Catlady on the health farm in *Clockwork Orange*, and the boxing match in the army and the fight between Barry and Bullingdon in the most recent movie. In *Lyndon*, the contrast of the two styles is probably most prominent. Since the focus in this movie is more on the order and formality than on the violence (as in *Clockwork Orange*), society's success in temporarily restraining and channelling aggression is shown by emphasising balanced, static composition in war and duel scenes.

Kubrick stresses the formal but essential cheapness or emptiness at the centre of these activities by his blatant, concentrated stylisation of them. Perhaps the wars and duels would not be so hypocritical if there were still honour and courage operating in the conflicts. However, there is only the unconscious malevolence and selfishness, whereas all the chivalrous ideals are dead, leaving only the jargon of nobility which is mouthed religiously. Kubrick is able to parade technical virtuosity by focusing on (not necessarily glorifying) the empty formalism of soulless rituals, complemented by a mannered cinematic style. His intentional stylisation aims to show the disparity between elaborate external physical activity relative to paltry internal values. Duels in *Lyndon* are complicated, elegant rituals of death presented as balanced compositions, and in war, handsome soldiers in gaudy regalia march to military music as they fall in a perfectly ordered cascade of death, without

disturbing the marching rhythm of other soldiers. This stylised depiction seems very mechanical, all plan and artifice, with no spontaneity or confusion. Kubrick's theatrical style, with clear, deliberately arty compositions, bespeaks a vision of a world anxious to perfect forms of behaviour without sufficient knowledge of essential human nature, which is irrational or violent and therefore not amenable to restrictive rules or laws.

Kubrick's stylisation of Alex's violence in *Clockwork Orange* evokes his sense of its dispassionate, mechanistic nature. Though primitive in his unabashed aggressiveness and cruelty, Alex is drawn with the same reduced potential for action as the soldiers in *Barry Lyndon*. The difference between them is that Alex's violence, though stylised, is still visceral, affective and repellent, whereas the stylised wars and duels are not unpleasant to watch. Part of the horror of the *Clockwork Orange* violence is the result of the filming, as in the fight with the Catlady. Here, there is no blood and hardly any physical contact at all until the very end, but the tension of the scene is generated by quick cutting and the handheld camera. The fight is actually a carefully choreographed ballet. The stylisation may suggest inhumanity and unreality, but close range and the threat of serious visual horror (with the gruesome beating of the writer still in mind) make the scene suspenseful or even painful to watch. In subsequent viewings, the terror is gone, as we know that the scene contains no physical details of the violence.

In these movies, Kubrick seems to be arguing that the ordering of violence, as he mimics the aristocratic 'art of war' in *Lyndon* and creates a similar ballet of violence in *Clockwork Orange*, does not approach the real problem of the unconscious causes of violence. The containing or institutionalising of it (in duels, by putting thugs in the police force, by conditioning panic-proof astronauts) is evasive, and as shaky as the handheld camera. Violence and passion are not predictable or controllable. Kubrick implies that they are ancient and fundamental, and that the savagery of the apes of 2001 is just as alive today, only hidden by a superficial gloss of propriety, manners and governmental or social sanctions. As we, like the apes, might seize the cudgel as our first tool, so it isn't surprising that our computers and cinema become merely more sophisticated and complex weapons.

Mental conditioning is Kubrick's metaphor of the attempt by one group to control or restrain the destructive energy and aggression of another. This is overt in *Clockwork Orange*, as Alex undergoes mental conditioning administered by the state to try to exorcise his violent instincts. With imagination, one can see that all the characters in these films are to some extent 'clockwork oranges', as mechanical metaphorically as Dr. Strangelove almost is physically. In Barry's unthinking, headlong rush to rise in society, there is a mechanical, beastly quality, for he has lost sight of the human values in prestige and peerage. Similarly, the conventions of wars and duelling are society's fixing of behaviour to make it predictable and ordered for no higher purpose than a superficial social harmony. In his effort to rise, Barry plays the aesthete and buys a painting by an



'2001': rear lighting as the astronauts confer in the spaceship

Italian artist named 'Ludovico', which is also the name of the mental conditioning process in *Clockwork Orange*. In the earlier film, violent movies are part of the Ludovico treatment. In both movies, art objects are abused to serve base, selfish ends. They are cogs in the conditioning process.

The manipulation of the apes by the superior Intelligence in *2001* seems a form of conditioning, or reduction in the latitude of behaviour. The astronauts are the most highly conditioned humans, having been trained to react predictably, and therefore competently, to any dangers that may turn up. This conditioning entails a purging of all irrational emotions and passions that the apes demonstrated. The established authority that this space culture represents also conditions the masses on earth to preclude any unruly riots or disturbances: when discussing how to announce the discovery of the monolith on the moon, Dr. Floyd warns of trouble 'if the facts were prematurely and suddenly made public without adequate preparation and conditioning.'

Kubrick has an extremely telling way of shooting his mechanical characters. As propriety, training or convention have given an unreasonable and unreasoned order to all their activities, they become flat, dull figures, as many critics have noticed. Critics have likened Alex and his droogs to comic strip characters, and this applies both substantively and visually. Kubrick favours very stark, brilliant rear lighting that flattens characters and emphasises outlines to suggest their two-dimensionality or lack of substance. They are, indeed, akin to cardboard figures, and have a comic book simplicity.

These clockwork oranges have repressed emotions, human compassion, and all passions. At the most significant moments, Alex becomes an actual silhouette to suggest his reduced being. This is not only when he has been mechanically reconstructed as a clockwork orange, with all his passions drained, but also when he is his most violent, unreasoning self, as during his attacks. He is a total silhouette visually when he assaults the tramp in the underpass as the film opens, and when he becomes a dehumanised object on stage after his mental conditioning. In both cases, brilliant rear lighting forces us to notice how flat, literally and metaphorically, he has become. Alex's disordered but consistent violence is exchanged for mechanical

pacifism, but in both instances there is a similar reduced potential for behaviour. Alex always lacks the integration of passion and reason that constitutes depth of character.

This use of stark rear lighting occurs in both *2001* and *Lyndon*, but an analysis of one scene from the latter film should clarify Kubrick's exploitation of this style. Barry has been caught kissing a maid by Lady Lyndon, and in the next scene he enters a room where she is bathing to apologise and gently kiss her. This scene has all the earmarks of conventional romanticism and mawkish sentimentality. But as Kubrick shoots it, there is no lyricism at all and it is utterly barren of passion. After all, Barry is not contrite: he only wants to give an appearance of repentance to continue his social climbing. The scene consequently seems heavy, deliberate, laboured. Lady Lyndon is looking her usual vacuous and slow-witted self. Barry approaches her with exaggerated tenderness and affection, and as they kiss, the light from the rear window frames them in a brilliance that drains all emotion from the scene. A shimmer of light adorns the edges of their bodies on the screen, giving a sense that only their emphasised surfaces are touching, but not their souls. (In *2001*, the rear-lit conference in the pod discussing HAL's possible mutiny works the same way. The astronauts should be more worried, or shocked, or perplexed; their calmness in this crisis indicates a void of feeling complemented by the reductive effect of the lighting.)

Some might sentimentally interpret this bathtub episode as a scene of true warmth 'Barry Lyndon': Ryan O'Neal, Marisa Berenson. '... the light from the rear window frames them in a brilliance that drains all emotion from the scene'



and genuine emotion. Indeed, there are many scenes in other movies in which an apologetic kiss works as a true instance of affection rather than affectation. In Hollywood movies, the same rear lighting is an established convention to convey feelings quite the opposite of what Kubrick wants here. Gentle back lighting combined with soft focus gave actresses an ethereal, hazy appearance. The light was usually off to the side, which gave them also a sculptured quality, suggestive of real depth of character. The total image was the visualisation of a dream: a perfect romantic evocation recorded on film for the soft-hearted or sympathetic sensibilities in the audience.

Kubrick's superficially saccharine scenes prove to be parodies of this Hollywood sentimentality when considered in the context of the complete movie. Individual compassion is a weakness when confronted with Kubrick's cynical societies, and the upwardly mobile Barry learns this early. When robbed by the highwayman, Barry tells his sob story in an attempt to soften the thief's heart. His whimpering only makes him look even more like a chump to the thief, who mocks his touching tale of woe. Later, there is some tenderness and apparently actual affection in the scene with the German woman, but the narrator undercuts our sentimental yearnings by noting dryly that his night of pleasure is not unique, in fact she had been 'stormed and occupied' (i.e. raped) many times before Barry found her. As in *Clockwork Orange*, the narrator sets the cool, detached tone of the movie.

The most obvious parody of Hollywood bathos is the superficially cloying death scene of Brian in *Barry Lyndon*, which works the same way as the 'there's no place like home' homecoming in *Clockwork Orange*. As the scene is so bloated, and with the melodramatic boo-hoing right on camera, I don't think it should be interpreted as a cause for true sympathetic sorrow for the viewer. Earlier we had seen that there is no room for individual compassion in this cynical world, and one showing this weakness is bound to be a sucker. Barry succumbs, however, and his softness is the active cause of his fall, as his depression from this death results in the fateful downward spiral of drinking and dissipation.

In all three movies, societies perform rituals that are time-honoured or traditional, but whose inner meaning has already been lost. In each, the mechanical acting out of the expected patterns of behaviour is a source of danger. In the first two there is a threat inherent in a runaway technology, in scientific or technological know-how, without any corresponding human values. In *2001*, the result is a killer computer, the most sophisticated and complicated piece of machinery, yet paradoxically as irrationally violent as the apes.

In *Clockwork Orange*, the totalitarian government is a highly structured bureaucracy and hierarchy, and its latest achievement is mental conditioning. This evil is an elaboration upon the theme of technological knowledge as a source of violence. Here, not only is technology in the form of drugs used to destroy Alex, but the technological art of cinema becomes part of the process. Art, like

In The Picture

Isherwood in Hollywood

In 1939, Christopher Isherwood moved out to Santa Monica where, thanks to a connection already established in England (Berthold Viertel, the Austrian film director and 'Bergmann' of his novel *Prater Violett*), he found immediate employment in Hollywood. Almost forty years later, his friends of that period—who included Viertel's wife Salka, scenarist of *Queen Christina*, and Garbo herself—having all dispersed, Isherwood is still active. When I spoke to him, he was correcting the proofs of a new book, *Christopher and his Kind*, which will take the autobiographical sequence begun by *Kathleen and Frank* up to his departure for the States.

About his movie career he has neither illusions nor regrets. 'I love movies, always have done. It was great fun working on them and I never felt that I was a "whore", a word that always irritated me immensely when I heard writers use it about themselves. But something would always go wrong. What was that thing Oscar Wilde said about putting his genius into his life and only his talent into his art? Well, I seem to have put my bad luck into film-writing and all my good luck into the rest of my life! It would be a bore to complain; but, really, the films I wrote have nearly all ended in disaster, mitigated or unmitigated.'

One of Isherwood's closest friends in Hollywood, Aldous Huxley, was being urged on all sides to write an original screenplay. 'Aldous hated writing that sort of thing, but we got together and worked out a rather elaborate treatment called *Jacob's Hands*. Aldous and Maria were living at a place called Llano, in the desert, and he, of course, was always very interested in his environment—he would soon know more about an area than many people who were born there. He was fascinated by all kinds of rare characters, and there was, on one of the ranches, a man with the gift of healing animals who was always being asked, "Why don't you heal human beings?" But he would answer that it might have incalculable effects, and quote the Bible: "Arise and walk—that's no trick, the trick is really to believe in

God." We wrote a story together about such a healer who did use his power on a human being, with disastrous results.

'The studio people thought it quite deplorable; they wanted something suave and cynical. You must understand that mystic doings were highly unfashionable in California at that period. Earlier or much later we could have sold the thing, but not then. Our second project—in 1949, I think—was somewhat farcical. I'd been to South America, and John Huston, always a good friend, was telling Aldous that he ought to write a script for him. So we concocted a plot called *Below the Equator* with all the tried and true Latin American ingredients—there was a dictator of sorts, an American pilot, some revolutionaries. But that never got off the ground.'

What of those films that did get off the ground? 'I am proud of a script called *Diane*. It was intended to be a stylish melodrama, liberally stolen from Balzac and various other people, about the young Catherine de Medici, the tournament, the prophecy that Henri II would be killed in a cage of gold, which turned out to be his helmet. But we got a completely wrong kind of cast. I was agitating for Julie Harris to play Catherine and

Ingrid Bergman to play Diane de Poitiers. Julie Harris, they figured, was only a stage actress and Ingrid Bergman was absolutely taboo. Needless to say, six months later, when it was too late, she came back in tremendous triumph.

'*The Great Sinner*, directed by Robert Siodmak, I only came in on to lend a hand. It should have been much better than it was. I still think it was an amusing idea to show what happened to Dostoevsky while he was writing *The Gambler*; but apart from a few good scenes, it was neither Dostoevsky's story nor the story of Dostoevsky.'

In the 1960s Isherwood worked in collaboration with Tony Richardson. 'I had fun doing *The Loved One*, but it was very much a composite piece and only odd things are mine. We did write together an adaptation of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, an excellent screenplay, in fact, and rather more faithful to the original than the version that was made. Oddly enough, before the project was abandoned for lack of financing, Tony had spoken of casting the same three stars that Huston later did.' Another script written with Richardson was an adaptation of Robert Graves' two *Claudius* novels. 'It was simply miraculous. We managed to pack both of them in—it was like the stateroom in *A Night at the Opera*! But that, too, came to nothing. As for *The Sailor from Gibraltar*, it was an absolute disaster. I'm no great admirer of Marguerite Duras, and the novel I thought one of those woo-wah pseudo-mystical things the French do. But Tony asked me, and I had a stab at it.'

The television film of *Frankenstein*? 'We were very pleased with ourselves—it was co-scripted by his friend, the painter Don Bachardy. 'Hunt Stromberg Jr., the producer, swore that everything would be according to our wishes. So we chose a director, John Boorman, and they wouldn't have him. We wanted Jon Voight to play Dr. Frankenstein, and they

wouldn't have him either. And they kept asking for additional scenes. It's terribly easy to invent when you have such an extraordinary myth to play with, and we supplied a two-hour version, a three-hour version, and so on. What had always struck me as the weakness of the novel was the creature's immediate ugliness and Frankenstein's immediately running away. So we set up a situation in which the experiment is an apparent success, the creature is beautiful at first, and there is even a father-son or homosexual relationship between him and his creator. Then, when the creature begins to turn into a monster, it's quite poignant, like someone you love getting cancer. We gave Frankenstein a younger brother who dies in a swimming accident—like Byron's friend who drowned in the Cam, God knows how—to motivate his creation of a living man, more bionic than Byronic. We got quite carried away, with helpings from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, in the form of a beautiful but heartless female creature who doesn't deteriorate.

'Then, quite suddenly, when shooting was about to start, there was a writers' strike in Hollywood and we found ourselves forbidden on pain of expulsion from the Screenwriters Guild to take any part in the proceedings, even by telephone. And, after all our additions to the script, Hunt announced that it was too long and would have to be cut. So they cut and rewrote it; the second half, in particular, is a shambles.'

I asked Isherwood if he contemplated writing for the movies again. 'Oh yes, why not? I receive offers all the time. And I love working in collaboration, especially with Don whom I've known for so long. Gottfried Reinhardt and I used to talk about what he called "the play mentality" and how important it was in this business. Screenwriting, to me, is the most absorbing of all games.'

GILBERT ADAIR

Fred Zinnemann directing 'Julia', based on Lillian Hellman's 'Pentimento' and starring Jane Fonda (as Lillian Hellman) and Vanessa Redgrave



Shukshin at Naples

The 1976 International Encounter with the Cinema was the most ambitious to date, befitting the celebration of its tenth anniversary, moving from the more intimate setting in Sorrento to crowded Naples. Attempting to 'encounter' the entire European cinema (15 films in, 14 out of, competition) as well as to include 'information' sections for German and Czechoslovakian films and mini-homages to Lang, Visconti, Bergman and Rossellini, the festival seemed disconcertingly diffuse; an impression encouraged by the lacklustre quality of most of the entries. That was, at least, the case until the screenings began of the films of Vasili Shukshin, the festival's major retrospective, electrifying the international press present, playing to ever-increasing audiences during the week and justifying the festival itself.

Although the documentation provided tended to be rather vague about Shukshin's career, this was evidently the first time the films had been seen together and the only time most have been seen at all outside the Soviet Union. Previously, Shukshin was not unknown in the West as an actor; he was the older protagonist of Marlen Kutziev's *The Two Feodors* (1958), but also appeared in more mediocre projects—dying of a heart attack at 45, indeed, while acting in Sergei Bondarchuk's indigestible war reconstruction *They Fought for Their Country* (1974). Shukshin's own last film, *Kalina Krasnaya* (*The Red Snowball Tree*), had a limited number of showings outside the USSR after becoming the most popular film there in 1975 in a version heavily cut—first 'voluntarily' by the director and then by the government censor.

Although Shukshin was awarded (posthumously!) the Lenin Prize, and in spite of the glowing, but still careful, praises heaped upon

him by the critic for *Pravda* in an essay written for the retrospective—including a tribute to his having 'put light on the profound social and existential problems of Soviet society'—it would appear that Shukshin was regarded as 'controversial' and his books and films as 'unexportable' during his lifetime. Indeed, at the time of his death he was encountering great difficulty in obtaining official permission to make a film about Stenka Razin.

It is not hard to see what might have caused problems. Shukshin was hardly an optimist, refusing either to find easy solutions to problems or to create an 'ideal hero'. In his first film as director-scenarist, *Zivet Takoj Paren* (*How a Young Man Lives*) in 1964, his protagonist, Pashka, is a braggart, a provincial Don Juan who floats through the countryside driving a truck at various rural projects where and when he chooses, drinking, singing and seducing as he goes. The portraits Shukshin draws of the people Pashka encounters are much the same as those of the characters in *Strannye Ljudi* (*Odd Folk*) and *Vash Syn i Brat* (*Your Son and Brother*). No matter where they are found, in the cities, in villages or on collective farms, people are living lives of quiet desperation.

Although not treated melodramatically, suicide, juvenile delinquency, crime, influence-peddling, divorce, violence and drunkenness are at least suggested as being part of the common experience. Moscow is presented as a labyrinth of inhuman bureaucracy. In *Vash Syn i Brat*, a son searches throughout the city for medicine for his ailing mother, meeting indifference everywhere and finally getting the medicine only through the influence of his wealthy brother, who has embraced most of the 'bourgeois' materialistic values. If that can be read as a critique of those who have lost their rural roots, Shukshin presents life in the coun-

try as little better. Even on the collective farm all is not well, as in *Kalina Krasnaya*: a widow, abandoned by her son who has been incarcerated in a prison camp, suffers in poverty (unrelieved by the local officials) and social alienation because of her son's criminal activity.

All is not unrelieved gloom, however. Tribulations are often treated with a comic edge, as in *Vash Syn i Brat*, when a son returns to his boyhood home to find his father seated at a table with a bottle of vodka. 'That's there to finish,' the old man says. Looking at the vodka the son replies, 'Don't take any more,' only to have his father softly correct the impression: 'Life is there to finish.' If there are only glimpses of an ultimately unobtainable happiness, as in *Kalina Krasnaya*, in relationships founded on mutual affection and respect or in self-fulfilling labour, there is also that sense of absurd laughter and a good deal of at least incidental joy to be found in fellowship and in the land itself. As one English critic remarked, Shukshin makes one think of the pantheism of Dovzhenko—although not at all of his style. One is also reminded of the mainstream of 19th century Russian literature, in which the land sustains and comforts, for in the films the fields and rivers of his native Altai region are almost always present.

Shukshin maintains a consistency of style in which a special treatment of landscape figures importantly. In all four films—and one can probably assume also in the fifth he directed, *Pecki Lavochki* (*Stoves and Benches*), which was unavailable for 'technical reasons'—the structures are episodic. Even in the more unified *Kalina Krasnaya*, the protagonist moves through the countryside in a series of 'encounters'. This penchant for episodes is also present in Shukshin's literary work; he wrote at least six collections of stories

with titles like *Peasants*, *Village Folks*, *Portraits*, and is 'the major star in the constellation of peasant prose which includes Vassilij Belov and Feodor Abramov.' It allows him to present a cross-section of people in relationship to a series of landscapes. Characteristically, he begins each film with a portrait of the land before he fills it with characters.

At moments of dramatic stress, Shukshin consistently moves his camera to follow behind his characters, letting them stop while the camera continues to move forward and upward to look beyond them to the sea, a grove of trees, or most often, a river. If nature is ever-present as a source of emotional nourishment, Shukshin refuses to treat the land sentimentally. His characters, however, do, especially in memory. Thus, in *Strannye Ljudi*, a young man leaves his wife behind on the farm to visit a brother in the city. As he becomes quickly disillusioned there, he imagines his return to the farm in bright sunshine, his wife greeting him with smiles in the midst of a flowering field. Reality would have it otherwise, of course, as he returns in a cold rain, trudging through a field of mud only to find his wife waiting moodily to ask him if he has any money left.

As Shukshin began his work in the cinema as an actor, studying with Mikhail Romm, he seems to have a particular sensitivity to actors. In his own films his performances are quieter and more introspective than those under the direction of Kutziev or Bondarchuk. But he would seem (at least on the evidence of *The Two Feodors*) to have learned a great deal from Kutziev about the uses of the tracking shot, and also about ensemble acting, having developed a Bergman-style repertory company for his films.

Subtitled prints of Shukshin's films are at present distributed only in Italy. A more complete reappraisal will have to wait until, and if, the films are distributed elsewhere as well. Still, even on the limited basis of a single retrospective, it appears that a major talent has been finally uncovered, if not discovered.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

Vasili Shukshin's 'How a Young Man Lives'



Happy Day

'In cinema we are about where our literary people, our painters, were in the 1930s,' says Pantelis Voulgaris, the 36-year-old director of *Happy Day*, awarded first prize at the 1976 Thessaloniki International Film Festival. 'They had to break away from influences like Eliot, Picasso, Hemingway and so on. People like Seferis and Elitis made the breakthrough, became Greek—not European or American—artists.'

Happy Day deals with the Greek prison island of Makronissos. The island gained infamy during the Civil War that followed World War II. Eighty thousand Greeks, nearly all political prisoners, spent time there before being transferred to

other island jails. The rest were common criminals often enlisted as guards and torturers by the military officials in command. Though Voulgaris' previous films followed a realistic style, *Happy Day* is impressionistic, subjective, more personal. 'What I hoped to do was find a way of creating my own language, using the light and space of Greece, the roots I have here. The challenge to my generation is to rid ourselves of forces and trends outside Greece.'

Given the political and economic pressures on Greek film-makers, it took courage for Voulgaris to break with the realistic tradition. Criticised by the Greek Left for not showing the political side of life in earlier films like *The Engagement of Anna* and *The Great Love Songs*, he has gone on to make a political film, but one that opts for a humanistic statement, not a simplistic one. *Happy Day* is not a black-and-white portrait of heroes and villains. It uses understatement and indirection in dramatising the complexities and ambiguities involved in attitudes to power and authority. It is a subtle, quiet, almost lyrical film, and for that reason may not be an easy one for its producers, the Greek Film Centre, a subsidiary of the National Industrial Development Bank, to sell abroad.

With the Greek cinema at its lowest point in years, the hope is for a film like *Happy Day* to succeed internationally. It is not just a question of making a profit on its investment (the film cost £83,000 to make), but of putting Greek cinema back on the map. Today the industry is in pieces, having been shattered in the late 60s by the impact of television and the heavy-handed colonels. Ten years ago, over a hundred feature films used to be made yearly in Greece; today the number stands at 39, more than half of which is porno product.

'The Greek film industry may be finished,' says Basil Maros, a leading cameraman and documentary film-maker (*Mount Athos, The Aegean Tragedy*). 'Unless we film people stand together and fight for something positive, I doubt whether many more features will be made here. At present, TV has taken over all our talent; they won't come back into film unless the government takes it seriously and gives it more support. To survive, Greek cinema must co-produce with foreign companies. We need to break out of the isolation imposed by our geography, religion and language, our individualist mentality. Film-makers like Cacoyannis and Voulgaris have shown that you can make films that are specifically Greek but universal in interest. But without major support from the government or the private sector, the mirror of a country that is cinema will go blank here.'

At present the survival of Greek cinema is largely in the hands of the Greek Film Centre. With a current budget of 20 million drachmas (about £330,000), the Centre has in the past two years produced four films besides *Happy Day*.

One of these is Michael Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, now in the cutting stage. The Centre's director, Spyros Skouros, is optimistic about the government's intentions to help revive the industry and co-production is also very much on the minds of those at the Centre. Meanwhile, Greek film hope rides a horse called *Happy Day*.

WILLARD MANUS

Tavernier in Scotland

Bertrand Tavernier, former *Cahiers* and *Positif* critic turned director, was in Scotland last October for a week of screenings at the invitation of the French Institute and the Scottish Film Council. His three features to date—a loose trilogy with Philippe Noiret as the central character in each—have yet to find a British distributor. But Tavernier is familiar with the problem; he did a stretch in distribution and exhibition, breaking through to French audiences with Boetticher and Fuller in the 1960s.

Tavernier's affinity with Hollywood extends beyond his critical writing to provide an active stimulus for his own work. His films, he says, are 'born out of anger'—an anger which is consistently directed at social injustices and the institutions which perpetuate them. He illustrates by alluding to Hollywood film noir: 'What fascinates me in the American crime film, and particularly in the film noir, is the way in which a coded system of social corruption was erected and made to work as a critique of the American Establishment of that time.'

Assisting and scripting for Chabrol (*L'Oeil du Malin*) and Godard (*Pierrot le Fou*), also for Melville; shifting from *Cahiers* to *Positif* as a critic, ensured that the auteur was still hero, particularly if he was blacklisted under McCarthy. Tavernier's latest film, *Le Juge et l'Assassin*, is dedicated to Abraham Polonsky, and Losey has described it as 'beautiful, original, violent and imposing.'

But a perspective of his position in the narrative tradition of French cinema also informs Tavernier's work. In each of the three films—the *policier* *L'Horloger de St. Paul*, the costume piece *Que la Fête Commence* and the reconstructed *fait divers* *Le Juge et l'Assassin*—the approach to the problem of narrative is consciously ambivalent. A series of dislocations from conventional narrative leads the viewer into a complicity with the action and its ideological consequences. The judicious use of Philippe Noiret in each film is an additional device for reversing audience expectations and deepening the ambiguity. Noiret begins in *L'Horloger* as an innocent citizen driven to implicate himself in his son's crime; in *Que la Fête Commence* he plays the Regent as a distinctively modern 'liberal' despot, opposed, as in *L'Horloger*, by the human face of Reaction in the person of Jean Rochefort.



Pantelis Voulgaris' *'Happy Day'*

With *Le Juge et l'Assassin* Noiret emerges, in Tavernier's words, as 'an accomplice of this corrupt society on which he depends for his living'—a more sinister and more monstrous figure than the multiple murderer with whom he shares the title.

Though there remains a problematic relationship between ideological intent and narrative expediency, particularly in the film's final sequence, *Le Juge et l'Assassin* is Tavernier's most assured work; a film in which he has, by allusion to Dreyfus, taken sides with Zola and pointed an accusatory finger at the kind of society which runs solely on institutional guidelines. Unlike the flow between Watergate and Hollywood, the Dreyfus affair has remained untapped by the French film industry and is a taboo subject even today—a recent ORTF film on the affair was heavily cut. Tavernier confesses himself attracted to the notion of a film on Dreyfus and a separate project on the Paris Commune.

As he accompanies screenings of his films in Edinburgh, Stirling and Glasgow, Tavernier discovers an oblique parallel between the three-cornered contestation of *Que la Fête Commence*—Regent/Establishment/Breton republican—and the interactions of fringe nationalists, reluctant devolutionists and old-style unionists. The movie quite unexpectedly offers a satirical gloss on the devolution/independence debate. After all, Tavernier sees the interventions of genuine polemic entering French cinema from Brittany and from Algeria. 'There must be a multitude of reasons for rebelling against central domination whether by Hollywood, Cinecittà, Mosfilm or Paris,' he says; 'there is a cinema which is breaking off in search of France.' He cites Godard's move to Grenoble, the emergent film industries in Switzerland and any number of new French features that might be loosely grouped as *films de province*. Admittedly some movement back to roots can be attributed to a nostalgia cult. There is too a sense in which nostalgia can operate geographically as much as his-

torically. For many fellow film-makers, among whom Tavernier enumerates André Techine, Philippe Nahoun, Maurice Pialat, 'this movement constitutes a rediscovery of the terrain of people like Pagnol and Renoir.'

MARTYN AUTY

Gore Vidal's Caligula

Although long barred from Dear Studios in Rome, where the 8½ million dollar spectacle *Gore Vidal's Caligula* is in production, Gore Vidal is very much a felt presence. Throughout the studio, in make-up rooms and mail offices, there are caricatures of and jokes about the author whose name has been so firmly contracted into the title that no matter what happens we will be faced on the screen with the rather unwieldy 'Gore Vidal's Caligula, a Film by Tinto Brass'. Everyone I spoke to around the set seemed obsessed by Vidal, from Malcolm McDowell who plays Caligula to producer Franco Rossellini. A mention of Vidal's charge that his script had been rewritten set off a long and colourful defence. Among the more printable points Rossellini made was that the original Vidal scenario has been 'unchanged, except that we have made visual a great number of pages of dialogue. And there have been writers working to introduce psychological motivation where Vidal supplies none.'

Feuds aside, the film is nearing completion on a scale that revives memories of MGM's Roman holiday with *Ben-Hur* or Fox's *Cleopatra*—films mentioned by the production staff only to indicate scale, for one is immediately assured that *Caligula* will be more 'intelligent' than the first and 'less pretentious' than the second. Every inch of the studio is filled to capacity with hundreds of workmen and specialists weaving and dyeing cloth, making costumes, sculpting statues, and constructing the giant sets (64 in all) that run the gamut from pleasure villas (requiring the partial reconstruction of half of Capri in the outskirts of Rome) to a huge stable with especially 'aged' tiles to house Caligula's favourite

stallion and sometime senator, Incitatus.

The sets and costumes are designed by Danilo Donati, who worked for Fellini (*Satyricon*, *Fellini Roma*, *Amarcord*, *Casanova*) as well as on films for Zeffirelli and Pasolini. The magnitude of the sets is rather overwhelming, but it would require a period specialist to recognise at a glance the authenticity (or speciousness) of detail. A professor from the University of Rome labours alone in a cubbyhole checking Donati's designs against photographs of historical artifacts, but one still is not certain that historical accuracy is the final goal. One of the photographs the professor was comparing to a detail of a column decoration, for instance, turned out on closer inspection to be a still from an Italian historical epic of the 1930s. Donati explained that: 'When the Fascists took power, one of the things they tried to do was to bring back the look of Imperial Rome. The result was something that neither recreated Rome nor said anything new; it was rather kitsch art, vaguely grotesque and certainly distorted. I strive to suggest this tendency towards excess that characterised both the Rome of Caligula and the Italy of the Fascists.'

Vidal and Tinto Brass both seem to agree that this will be 'the first realistic film about ancient Rome.' A press release further hints, without evident irony, that 'the film leaves nothing to the imagination.' So much so, evidently, that Brass is using three cameras to film three different versions—one to please any censor anywhere, for all the members of the large, mostly English cast (the film is being shot in direct sound in English) are required at one or another point to appear nude, with two exceptions: John Gielgud as the Senator Nerva, from which task age and dignity except him, and Peter O'Toole, whose facial make-up as a 78-year-old Tiberius with running syphilis sores is disgusting enough without exposing the rest of him. Perhaps some things are better left to the imagination.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

Tehran: Children

The 'problem picture' was alive and well and solemnly addressing itself to audiences of 'children and young adults' at Tehran's 11th international children's film festival, in November 1976. Both inside and outside the classroom, in the ten features and some fifty-three animated and live-action shorts shown in competition, children were admonished to be morally accountable and socially responsible (and quite narrowly respectful of parents and teachers). Whether it came from West or East, the conservative tenor of this message seemed to be the same, from a Japanese film, *The Flag, Class, Grade 4*, about children learning with shrill optimism to revere everything in their educational system, to a Russian stricture, *The Prank*, which tries very

stiffly to accommodate pop singing in its canon of socially acceptable ambitions, and a Sri Lankan film by Lester James Peries, *The Enchanted Island*, in which a troublesome adolescent learns to care for his own plot of land.

Probably the most technically accomplished of the feature films, the Hungarian *No Man's Daughter*, directed by Laszlo Ranody, unfortunately seemed to be the least suitable for children, given its relentlessly gruelling picture of the plight of orphans in the 30s, parcelled out to rural foster homes by the state orphanage. If the physical horrors had been less fulsomely indulged, in fact, the film might have made something more substantial of its subject, rather than pushing it into the realm of morbid fairy-tale. As it is, the ending is both an obscurely revolutionary and lamely mystificatory gesture, in which the small heroine finally sets her cruel step-parents' farm ablaze, possibly committing suicide at the same time.

The English-speaking countries came closest, in this rather desiccated programme, to providing sheer escapist entertainment. Britain was represented by the over-represented *Bugsy Malone*, and the U.S.A., in co-operation with the U.S.S.R., by *The Blue Bird*, a creakingly stale adaptation of Maeterlinck, sadly signed by George Cukor but actually looking as if all its expensive production values had been not so much directed as dropped roughly into place. Of the many big-name stars called in to wax philosophical—or, more frequently, to stand marooned in a sea of gaudily mistimed special effects—Jane Fonda seems

the most incongruously cast as the Queen of Night, taking the part at a sibilant rush that suggests nothing so much as an impatience to get to the end.

For the most part, the animated shorts stuck even more rigidly to formula, with the East European studios rivalling Disney at his worst for their banal adventures spread thinly—and animated flatly—over a range of anthropomorphised creatures. One Russian cartoon, *A Hedgehog in the Fog*, distinguished itself by managing to suggest a degree of depth (and change, after some unsettling adventures in the fog) in its title character, and by conjuring an atmosphere evocative of some cryptic fairy-story. There was even more style, but a patently unidentifiable point, to the Hungarian fantasy *Scenes with Beans*, which creates an alternative cosmos and peoples it entirely with beans of all types and stripes. After lovingly detailing all the paraphernalia of this tiny world (an upended holy book serves as a vast cathedral), the film takes time out for a little political allegory—the beans are spied on by some sinister contraption from space—that remains wilfully oblique.

The live-action short category was occupied almost exclusively by native Iranian products, which bemusingly all seemed to have been filmed in the Sohrab Shahid Saless manner—uncomplicated narratives, presented in leisurely, emotionally unaccented scenes. The style went badly with the contrived pop morality of *The Horse*, the story of a boy and his horse rejecting the clamorous big city for wholesome village life, but was

nicely attuned to the subject of *The Bamboo Fence*, in which a small boy exercises his ingenuity in saving and keeping an abandoned puppy from the hostile attention of his father. The restraint and calm objectivity of the latter film was particularly welcome in a festival that seemed to be devoted less to children than to a legion of sympathetic animals.

RICHARD COMBS

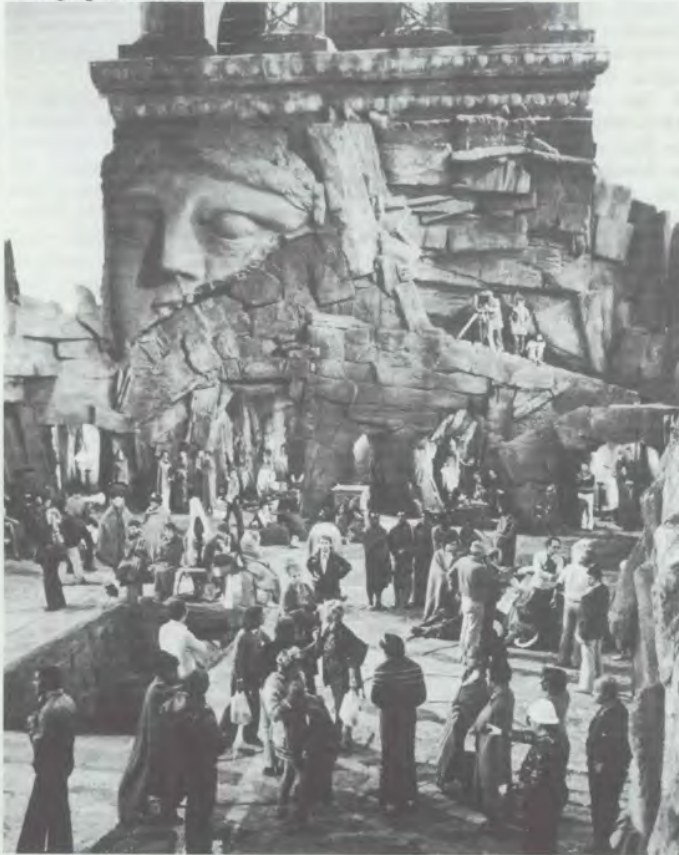
1976: Obituary

DECEMBER '75: Thornton Wilder, novelist and playwright who wrote the screenplay for *Shadow of a Doubt*; William Wellman, director (*Wings*, *The Ox Bow Incident*, *Nothing Sacred*); Pierre Bost, co-author with Jean Aurenche of screenplays for many memorable post-war French films (*Le Diable au Corps*, *Les Jeux Interdits*, *Le Blé en Herbe*); Arthur Treacher, British actor who became Hollywood's archetypal screen butler (*Thank You, Jeeves*, *Mary Poppins*); Bernard Herrmann, composer, notably for Welles and Hitchcock; Tilly Losch, graceful Austrian-born dancer, on screen in *The Garden of Allah*, *The Good Earth* and *Duel in the Sun*; Arline Judge, adaptable leading lady of the 30s and 40s (*Bachelor Apartment*, *Girl Crazy*); Rowland V. Lee, veteran American director (*Zoo in Budapest*, *Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*); Frank Sully, prolific American character actor, usually cast as kindly cop or wise-cracking sidekick (*The Last Hurrah*, *Funny Girl*); Christopher Young, producer/director of American avant-garde films (*Subject Lesson*, *Object Lesson*).

JANUARY: Paul Robeson, singer, actor and activist for the rights of the American negro, whose screen roles sadly typified the stereotyped image (*Showboat*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Sanders of the River*); Friedrich Hollaender, German composer, and song-writer for Dietrich, who later worked in Hollywood; Louis F. Edelman, American film and TV producer (*White Heat*); Sonia Dresdel, British actress usually cast as steely overbearing type, notably as the housekeeper in *The Fallen Idol*; Herman van der Horst, Dutch documentary director; Fernand Sardou, French actor of bucolic character parts, usually in Fernandel films; Margaret Leighton, elegant British actress (*Under Capricorn*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Go-Between*); Michael Gwynn, reliable British film and TV actor, usually playing quietly dependable professional men.

FEBRUARY: Sal Mineo, best remembered as the misfit teenager befriended by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*; Lily Pons, petite French coloratura who appeared in several Hollywood films during a brief opera boom (*That Girl from Paris*, *I Dream Too Much*); Jean Servais, stalwart French character actor, notably in *Le Plaisir*, *Rififi*, *Celui qui doit mourir*; Angela Baddeley, British character

'Gore Vidal's Caligula': reconstruction of Tiberius' grotto on Capri. Photograph: Mario Tursi



actress in film (*Ghost Train*, *Tom Jones*) and TV, best remembered as Mrs. Bridges, the grumpy cook with the heart of gold in *Upstairs, Downstairs*; Maria Corda, vivacious Hungarian star of European silent cinema, particularly in the early films of her husband, Alexander Korda; Fuzzy Knight, Hollywood character actor, bumbling sidekick to Johnny Mack Brown and Tex Ritter in many Westerns; William Belasco, Hollywood agent and producer (*The Last Hard Men*); Oscar Dancigers, Russian-born producer who settled in Mexico, where he produced Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *El*; Hans Richter, German painter, film-maker and pioneer Dadaist (*Rhythm 21*, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*); Joseph Henabery, veteran Hollywood actor who played Abraham Lincoln in *Birth of a Nation*, and later directed Fairbanks and Valentino; Lee J. Cobb, distinguished American stage and screen actor, the first Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and screen actor of powerful character roles, notably as the racketeer in *On the Waterfront*; Roger Livesey, plummy-voiced epitome of the solid English gentleman (*The Four Feathers*, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *I Know Where I'm Going*).

MARCH: Busby Berkeley, choreographer whose flamboyant style stamped a generation of Hollywood musicals; Luchino Visconti, director; Maxie Rosenbloom, boxer who was type-cast in Hollywood as punch-drunk fighter or slaphappy hood (*Nothing Sacred*, *Louisiana Purchase*); Richard Arlen, who starred in Wellman's *Wings* and went on to play the heavy in action films (*Desperate Hours*, *Forced Landing*); Michael Goodliffe, British actor of officers and gentlemen (*The Wooden Horse*, *Battle of the River Plate*); William V. Skall, American cinematographer, one of the Technicolor pioneers (*Kim*, *Northwest Passage*, *Quo Vadis*); Hans Sohnle, German set designer, notably on Pabst's *The Joyless Street*; Albert Dieudonné, Gance's *Napoleon*.

APRIL: Howard Hughes, who before seclusion produced *Hell's Angels* and *The Outlaw* and ran RKO; Paul Ford, American character actor usually cast as amiable bumbler (*The Teahouse of the August Moon*, *Advise and Consent*); Martin Rackin, American screenwriter and producer; Paul Strand, American photographer (*The Plow That Broke the Plains*) and documentarist (*Native Land*); Beatrice Dawson, British costume designer (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Servant*, *Accident*); Carol Reed, director; Sid James, ever-cheerful British actor who played Cockney crooks and cab drivers in Ealing comedies and *Carry On* films and partnered Hancock on television; Leonide Moguy, Russian-born director who worked in France (*Prison Without Bars*).

MAY: Miriam Cooper Walsh, American silent screen actress who played leading roles for Griffith;

Alan Baxter, Hollywood actor who specialised in baby-faced gangsters, tough executives and army officers (*Winged Victory*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*); David Bruce, American actor who played leading roles in wartime B pictures.

JUNE: Sybil Thorndike, distinguished actress whose relatively rare screen appearances included stately dowagers and character parts (*Major Barbara*, *Hindle Wakes*, *Stage Fright*); Avice Landon, British character actress, usually cast as unflappable nurse or secretary (*White Corridors*, *Reach for the Sky*); Lillian Hill Callahan, American actress in silent era (*Ben Hur*); Stanley Baker, flamboyant Welsh actor, who brought the same faintly menacing conviction to tough villains (*The Criminal*), cops (*Blind Date*) and costume roles (*Zulu*), and was at his best as the amoral academic in *Accident*; Johnny Mercer, prolific American lyricist and composer; Adolph Zukor, at 103 the last surviving Hollywood mogul, who preferred to run Paramount from New York; Zoltan Latinovits, Hungarian actor who appeared in several Jancsó films.

JULY: Frances Goldwyn, Samuel Goldwyn's chief consultant for the 48 years of their marriage; Lucy Mannheim, German-born character actress in British films—the mysterious victim in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*; James Wong Howe, Chinese-born Hollywood cinematographer, particularly distinguished for his luminous use of black and white (*Fire Over England*, *The Sweet Smell of Success*, *Hud*); Arthur Hornblow, Jr., veteran American producer (*Gaslight*, *Asphalt Jungle*); Norman Foster, American actor and director (*Journey into Fear*); Paul Gallico, American author and screenwriter (*Lili*, *The Poseidon Adventure*); Ray Kellogg, veteran Hollywood director of Westerns.

AUGUST: Abram Room, Russian director; William Redfield, adaptable American character actor, whose last part was his best (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*); William Mervyn, British actor, usually cast as cheerful clergyman or kind elderly uncle (*The Railway Children*); Fritz Lang, director; Phyllis Konstam, leading lady of British films in the 30s (*Murder*); Ray Corrigan, Johnny Weissmuller's double, later played leads in athletic series and Westerns; Kip Herren, for nearly twenty years manager of Pinewood Studios; Alastair Sim, genially idiosyncratic Scottish actor whose purring diction and manically gleaming eyes livened film comedy for thirty years.

SEPTEMBER: Dalton Trumbo, American screenwriter (and latterly director of *Johnny Got His Gun*), one of the Hollywood Ten, who won an Oscar under a pseudonym and wrote screenplays for *Spartacus*, *Lonely Are the Brave* and *Exodus* among many others; Paul Dehn, British film critic and screen writer (*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *Murder on the Orient Express*); William Farr, Deputy



Busby Berkeley; Alastair Sim and Sybil Thorndike (in 'Stage Fright'); Margaret Leighton

Director of the BFI and Editor of *Sight and Sound* in the 30s.

OCTOBER: Edith Evans, whose film roles included her definitive Lady Bracknell and versatile performances, comic and tragic, in *Queen of Spades*, *Tom Jones* and *The Whisperers*; Slavko Vorkapich, Yugoslav-born montage and special effects expert, responsible for the plague of locusts in *The Good Earth*, battle scenes in *Firefly* and work in many other Hollywood films; Joseph L. McEveety, American writer and producer, mainly on Disney comedies; Raymond Queneau, French writer whose *Zazie dans le Métro* was directed by Malle; Barbara Nichols, American actress specialising in deceptively dumb blondes (*The Scarface Mob*, *The King and Four Queens*).

NOVEMBER: Cyril Bennett, chief programme executive of London Weekend Television; Jean Gabin; Man Ray, American Dadaist, who appeared in Clair's *Entr'acte*, directed abstract films in the 20s and later a sequence in *Dreams that Money Can Buy*; Rupert Davies, television's Maigret; Rosalind Russell; black actor Godfrey Cambridge (*Watermelon Man*).

1976: The Top Ten

THE BAD NEWS BEARS *** DOG DAY AFTERNOON *** EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE, ZOOPRAXOGRAPHER *** FAMILY PLOT *** THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING *** THE MISSOURI BREAKS *** SANSHO DAYU *** THE STORY OF SIN *** THE TENANT *** XALA

—Geoff Brown

BARRY LYNDON *** CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING *** FAMILY PLOT *** LA FAUTE DE L'ABBE MOURET *** GALILEO (Loscy) *** THE MISSOURI BREAKS *** THE RETURN OF THE PINK PANTHER *** SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI *** THE SHOOTIST *** THE TENANT

—Richard Combs

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN *** CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING *** FAMILY PLOT *** THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH *** THE MISSOURI BREAKS *** THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES *** POACHERS *** THE SHOOTIST *** TAXI DRIVER *** THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS

—Philip French

CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING *** DOG DAY AFTERNOON *** DIE MARQUISE VON O... *** THE MEMORY OF JUSTICE *** RENDEZVOUS AT BRAY *** SANSHO DAYU *** THE SHOOTIST *** SUNDAY TOO FAR AWAY *** A TOUCH OF ZEN *** THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS

—John Gillett

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN *** AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PRINCESS *** BARRY LYNDON *** FAMILY PLOT *** F FOR FAKE *** DIE MARQUISE VON O... *** THE MEMORY OF JUSTICE *** RENDEZVOUS AT BRAY *** SANSHO DAYU *** THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS

—Penelope Houston

CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING *** THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH *** DIE MARQUISE VON O... *** THE STORY OF SIN *** THE MISSOURI BREAKS *** THE SHOOTIST *** RENDEZVOUS AT BRAY *** DER VERLORENE *** HUSTLE *** STAY HUNGRY

—Tom Milne

SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI *** FIVE WOMEN AROUND UTAMARO *** SANSHO DAYU *** NUMBER TWO *** CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING *** FAMILY PLOT *** F FOR FAKE *** COILIN AND PLATONIDA *** BREAKING WITH OLD IDEAS (Peking Film Studio) *** EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE, ZOOPRAXOGRAPHER

—Jonathan Rosenbaum

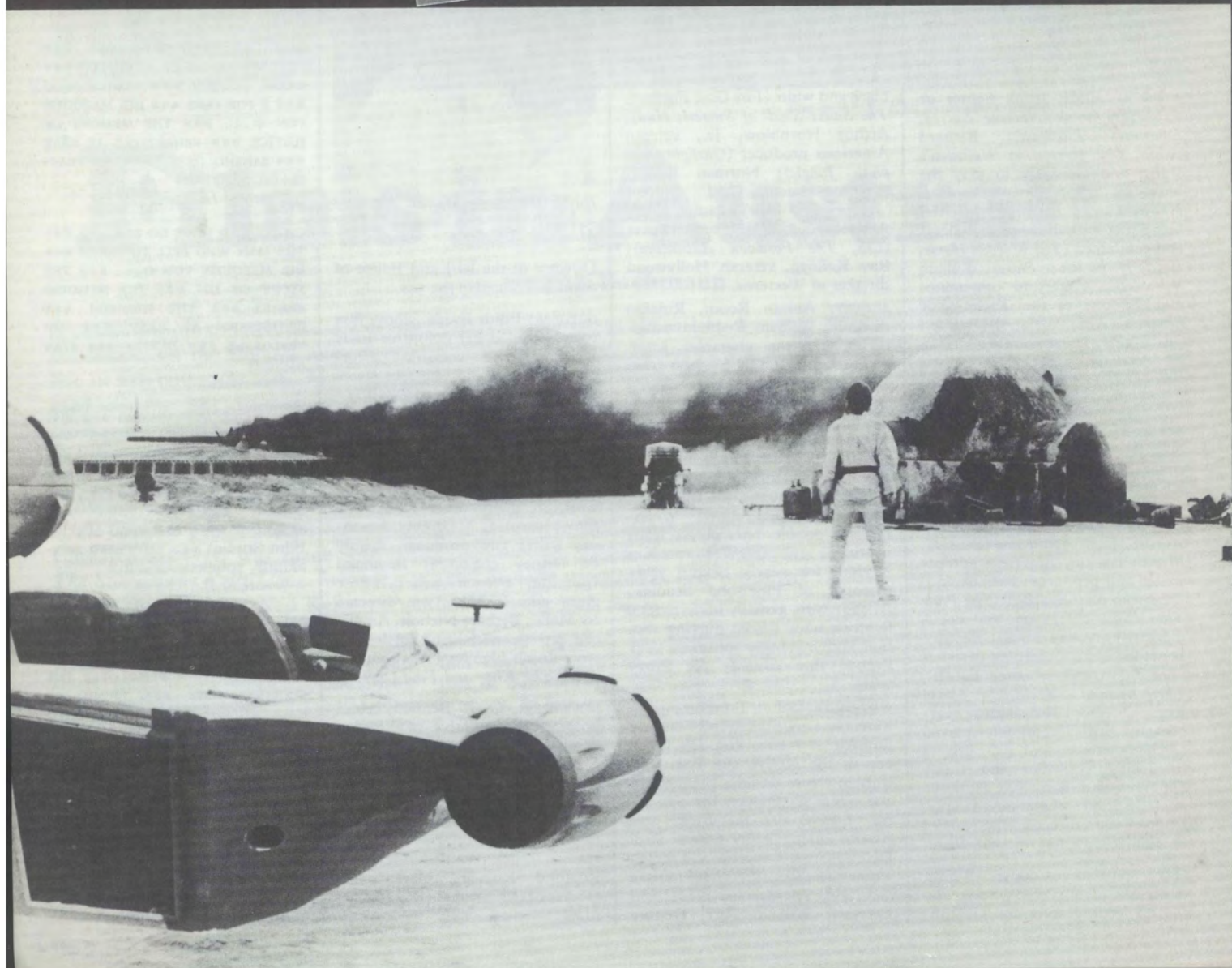
ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN *** BARRY LYNDON *** FACE TO FACE *** FAMILY PLOT *** THE MAGIC FLUTE *** ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST *** PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK *** SANSHO DAYU *** SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI *** WAVELENGTH

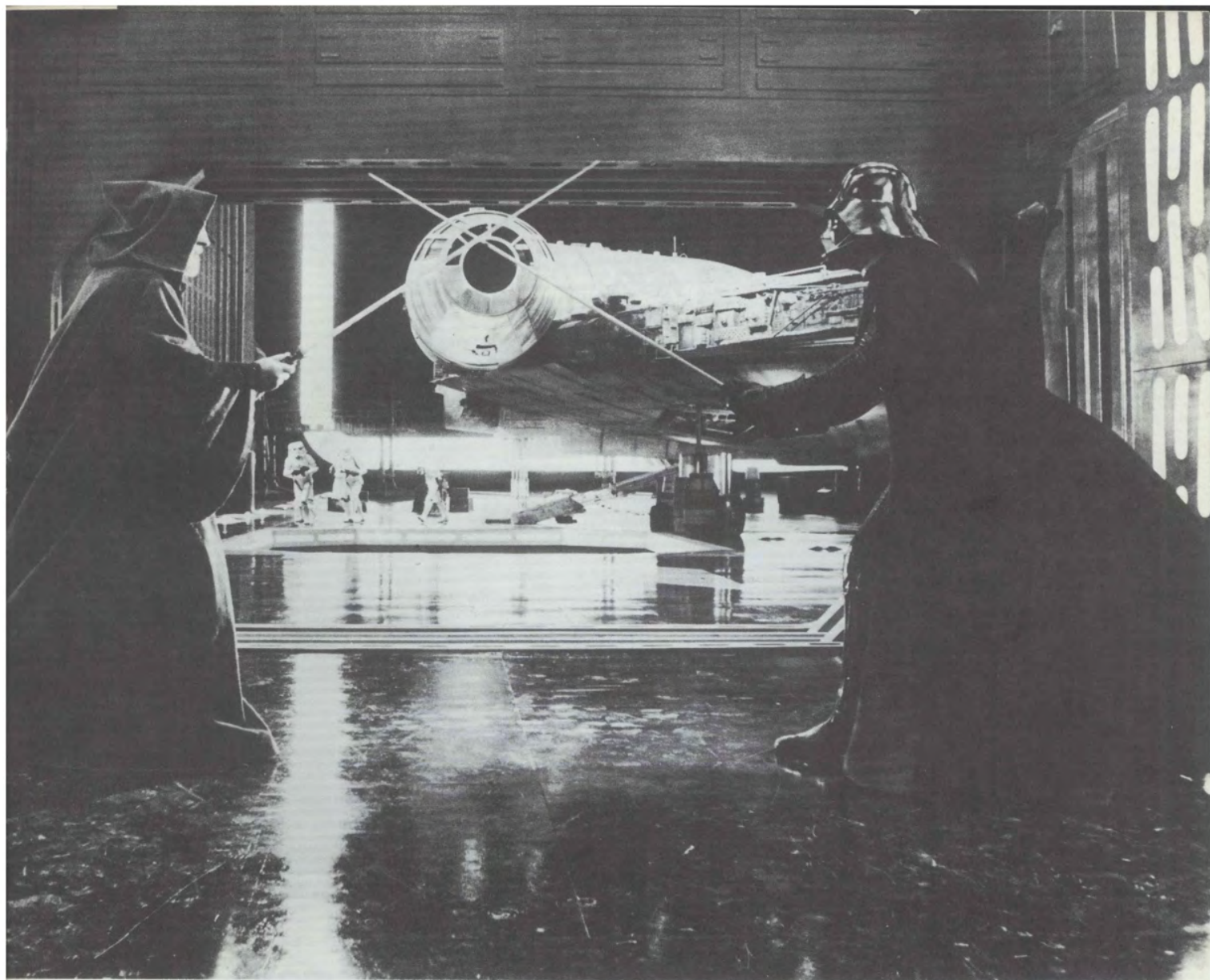
—Philip Strick

F FOR FAKE *** GREAT! (Bob Godfrey) *** MOON OVER THE ALLEY *** PASTORAL HIDE AND SEEK *** SANSHO DAYU *** SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI *** THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS *** XALA

—David Wilson

STAR WARS





'An intergalactic dream of heroism,' is George Lucas' description of his *Star Wars*. He has also called it 'total fantasy for today's kids who don't have the opportunity to grow up watching *Flash Gordon* and have to sit through movies of insecurity instead'. Camerawork is by Gil Taylor, production design by John Barry; Mark Hamill plays the hero, Luke Starkiller; Alec Guinness (above) crosses swords in the space hangar.



The outback: Ken Hannam's 'Sunday Too Far Away'

Films in Australia

Gideon Bachmann

A country approximately the size of the United States, fifteen times less densely populated. Of the slightly more than 13 million Australians, about 70 per cent live in five cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth. Rudimentary road systems. 884 cinemas; of these, 280 drive-ins, 219 hard-tops in the major cities, 385 around the countryside. Cinema tickets at high prices, about £1.30, but high movie-going figures, making Australia the world's fourth most important film market.

An old industry, starting with features in 1900, before anybody else. *Soldiers of the Cross*, a papier-mâché Salvation Army reconstruction of the plight of the Christian martyrs, was made just before the six Australian states federated; *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, following in 1906, created the screen's first romantic hero in the person of Ned Kelly, the outlaw with the iron mask.

But what we know of Australia on the screen we know from films made by outsiders: Harry Watt's *The Overlanders* (1946), Lewis Milestone's *Kangaroo* (1951), John Heyer's *Back of Beyond* (1953), Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959) and Fred Zinnemann's *The Sundowners* (1960). What we recall of earlier, more Australian material, like *The Forty Thousand Horsemen* by Charles Chauvel (1940) and the same director's *Rats of Tobruk* (1944), owes its foreign fame to the popularity, in wartime, of the ally from down under, the desert rat Aussie soldier, and to some sort of Com-

monwealth solidarity. No Australian silent film has ever appeared on the 'ten best' lists of our Cinémathèques and film publications. In fact, none should have.

The history of Australian cinema, which won't concern us here except as a point of departure, is a simple story of colonial economics. The experts—American, English—came, saw and conquered, making American and British films and taking their revenue away with them. No Australian style developed; there were native talents, but they never really had a chance. The market situation, the cultural remoteness,

the economic frontier mentality, the sheer size of the place in relation to the sparse population, the hard-working spirit of a melting-pot era, and the need for rapid turnover amortisation of foreign capital with a mining mentality—all contributed towards keeping films at a lowest common denominator level. The early silent ones define themselves by their titles: *Mates from the Murrumbidgee* (1911), *The Swagman's Story* (1914), *The Man from Kangaroo* (1918), *A Girl of the Bush* (1921), *The Dinkum Bloke* (1923), *The Birth of White Australia* (1928). Some, in this period, stand out for a feeling of space and environment, and a curious blend of realism and sentimentality, like *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1914), *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), *Sunshine Sally* (1923) and the classic *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927).

The names of the directors who made these films are remembered less for the films themselves than for the adventurous ways in which they were made: each film was a new beginning, almost a miracle. There was no continuity, no tradition could build up. Financing from local sources was never co-ordinated; foreign



Ted Kotcheff's 'Wake in Fright': '... the strongest feeling of authenticity ...'

money (and foreign ideas) dominated. Charles Chauvel, Ken G. Hall, Norman Dawn, Raymond Longford and Lawson Harris worked in a cinema of limited possibilities; throughout the 1930s and until after World War II the concentration on themes of the bushlands, of pioneers in sentimental yokes, of Victorian settings, of mateship and sheep-shearing, of 'Dave and Dad' comics and of an occasional, well-meaning attempt at using aboriginals in adventure films (not excluding a love interest) remained fairly standard. Some subjects were made again and again—the Ned Kelly story haunts Australian cinema since its inception, and the formula idea seems to have been invented here. With rare exceptions, there were no lasting works.

In 1972 the Whitlam Labour Government brought to an end 23 years of Liberal, right of centre rule, which had devoted only a small effort to culture and the arts. But a Tariff Board Inquiry set up by John Gorton, the Liberal Prime Minister, made a complete survey of the industry and recommended financial help. Which eventually led to the establishment, in 1970, of the Australian Film Development Corporation, which in four years of bank-like activity co-ordinated the financing for 54 cinema and 42 television film projects. It has since been superseded by the Australian Film Commission, started under Whitlam, and the Film and Television Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. The Commission grants loans up to a third of budget for the

production of features, and the Board subsidised, until recently, the experimental and short film sector. Grants have gone to hundreds of film-makers, and some of the results, like Gill Armstrong's *The Singer and the Dancer*, have been finished, seen and lauded at a variety of international events. At the time of writing, plans are afoot to align the activities of the Board with those of the Commission, and it is feared that this will lead to further commercialisation. 'Further', because the basic tenet of the Commission's activities is commercial encouragement.

Other bodies of a semi-official nature produce feature films, such as the South Australia Film Corporation, with headquarters in Adelaide. The Corporation has been instrumental in the production of two of the recent best-sellers of the Australian cinema, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Peter Weir and *Sunday Too Far Away* by Ken Hannam, and has since produced Don Chaffey's *Fourth Wish*, one of the few contemporary stories in Australian films, and *Stormboy*, by Henry Saffran. Not averse to commerce, the Corporation seems, to this outside observer, the body at the moment most concerned with the establishment of a true Australian cinema.

Considerable euphoria abounds. At Cannes, Edinburgh, Locarno and Mannheim last year, films from Australia provided a hefty presence. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, in six months of home release, made A\$2,000,000, dominating Australian screens in tandem with *Jaws*. *Caddie*, by Donald

Crombie, and *Devil's Playground*, by Fred Schepisi, were close followers, with the latter winning practically the entire list of available 1976 prizes handed out by the Australian Film Institute.

Average Australian feature films today cost from A\$300,000 to A\$450,000, and more. Just to break even, a film must thus make—on the basis of standard Australian distribution practice—a minimum of A\$800,000 to a million; as in most countries, calculations are made only on the basis of national returns, with foreign income regarded as welcome but unreliable. There are no real Australian stars; Jack Thompson comes closest and appears in practically every film, with minimal justification. The AFC recently turned down a project by Antonioni (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1976), because the money which had been set aside for Gene Hackman's fee alone was enough to make some three films in Australia.

There is considerable public interest in the 'serious' film. There are five film festivals, one in each of the major cities, with the Sydney and Melbourne ones rivals for critical stature. Perth and Adelaide even pay for films—a unique departure in the festival world, which may sooner or later set trends as festivals increase in number all over the world, while the films worth showing do not, and the opportunities for seeing the few important ones in the cinemas are handicapped by distribution practice. What's more, the best of the Sydney Festival films—a group of six or eight—

travel all over the continent after their initial exposure: possibly the world's best example for the fulfilment of a festival's cultural mission.

And there is a national film school, now in its third year of operation, lavishly funded (A\$3½ million in accordance with recent decisions), pumping 25 graduates per year into the TV and film trades. A number of universities, in addition, have film courses—in the short time that I spent in Australia I managed to lecture at twelve of these, in three cities, and found an alert, critical and enthusiastic audience, not always up on the latest developments, but eager to catch up. As almost everywhere in film schools today, loyalties seem about even: those pursuing film-political aims, pure career seekers, and followers of Andy Warhol.

There are also a number of film co-ops, financed in part by the Film and TV Board, and an extensive catalogue of rental films, similar to the ones in American and British co-ops, is at the disposal of groups wanting to show experimental, political, avant-garde, underground, art and animation shorts and features. This work is amplified by the National Film Theatre of Australia (one or two nights a week, taking films into Canberra and other state capitals) and the National Film Library, in Canberra, from which groups can obtain a large number of important world films free of charge. All this is on 16mm.

The Board also finances *Cinema Papers*, Australia's main film magazine, and 'Access Centres' in ten localities, shopfront situations offering the use of half-inch video equipment to citizens with the possibility of access to TV stations and distribution. Subsidies go to the Australian Film Institute's three cinemas (so far, two in Melbourne and one in Hobart, with it is hoped more in the offing), to the various film festivals (greater subsidies to the smaller ones of Perth and Adelaide) and to access radio stations, including substantial sums to new stations as establishment grants. All this out of a current annual budget of A\$1,900,000, so far including grants to 146 small film projects (ranging from A\$811 to A\$6,123) and 16 major grants of A\$25,000.

The statistics are even more impressive when seen in context: the national subsidy programme includes (in millions of Australian dollars): 19.4 for support of the arts, including the 3.5 million for the film school; 7.2 for the Australian Film Commission; 4.0 for the National Library; and 3.0 for administration, which makes a total of almost A\$3.00 per head of population per year for the arts.

The interest in the cinema as something that goes beyond commerce, however, is recent, and previously there had been no effort to conserve films or even to consider them as valuable historical material. So no real records exist. Joan Long, who wrote *Caddie*, tells the story of the shooting of *For the Term of His Natural Life* in 1926, when, for the scene of the burning of a ship at sea, an old hulk was loaded up with old nitrate prints, and hundreds of films from the 'Australasian' vaults went up in smoke. Nobody took films seriously, least of all the public and the money people. For years it was useless to be creative: nobody

wanted you and nobody gave you money.

A listing of Australian films published on the occasion of a 1975 retrospective by the Sydney Film Festival numbers 247 silent and 193 sound features made to that date, including all the films made in Australia by foreigners. Between 1972 and 1975 the Australian Film Commission's listing includes an additional 10 features; and in 1976 14 films were to be completed, making a total of 217 sound features to date.

The other side of the story emerges from an AFC statistic which proudly states that 'by 1947, 68 films had been wholly financed and made by Australians.' Since 121 features were made between 1947 and 1975, the publication date of this statistic, a small amount of arithmetic reveals that between 1900 and 1947, out of a total of 319 films, only 21 per cent were of national origin. That is the root fact at the base of the Australian film industry's malaise.

Some Films

The titles upon which the recent surge of fame for films from Australia is based can be listed, very approximately, as follows:

- 1971 WAKE IN FRIGHT (Ted Kotcheff)
- WALKABOUT (Nicolas Roeg)
- 1972 no productions of critical standard
- 1973 that I have seen
- 1974 BETWEEN WARS (Michael Thornhill)
- 1975 SUNDAY TOO FAR AWAY (Ken Hannam)
- PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK
- (Peter Weir)
- 1976 CADDIE (Donald Crombie)
- DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND (Fred Schepisi)
- MAD DOG MORGAN (Philippe Mora)
- THE TRESPASSERS (John Duigan)

This is a purely personal and critical choice. The Australian public has two other preferred directors, not included in the above list: Tim Burstall and Bruce Beresford. The latter—long a resident of the U.K., where he was secretary of the B.F.I. Production Board—is the director of the Barry McKenzie adventures, of which two have been made (and exported with some success). They are farces. Tim Burstall is another matter altogether: he is widely considered one of the most talented of Australian film-makers, but is equally widely lamented as one who has gone purely commercial. His prolific output—*Stork* (1971), *Alvin Purple* (1973), *Petersen* (1974), *End Play* (1975) and *Eliza Fraser*, which was shooting when I was in Australia last July—steers a clever course between popularity and craft. His films are popular in Australia, and his talent is undeniable even though many critics regret his compromises. His films include, somewhat as a novelty for Australia, sexual entanglements not ungraphically displayed, and he is one of the few film-makers who tackles contemporary themes.

Ted Kotcheff and Nicolas Roeg, of course, are not Australians, but perhaps this helped them to see; there can be no doubt that their two films, both made in 1971, are among the most expressive of what—to this unbiased observer—seems to be a typically Australian feeling for landscape, light, distance, isolation, animal life and loneliness. *Walkabout* is the story of a boy and his sister facing the desert together after the death of their father. It is not

linked to a particular moment in history and may thus be considered contemporary, although like most Australian films set in the bush and the wide open lands it inevitably and romantically creates nostalgia and thus the feeling of time past.

Wake in Fright, renamed *Outback* for a European release in 1972, was made by its Canadian director in one of those towns in the area to which the second title refers, and tells the story of a schoolteacher slowly succumbing to the stupefying, deadening impact of 'mateship', superficiality, remoteness from humanity in both the physical and extended sense, and from women. Tiboonda is a schoolhouse, a 20-foot wooden railroad platform and a drinkhouse (any other name would be too quaint), where any vestiges of feeling are drowned in booze and gambling. Human contact is limited to essentials, kangaroos stabbed savagely as they are immobilised by the glare of a car's headlights provide the entertainment, sex is non-existent or offered in rotation by the single girl in the place. Donald Pleasence, Chips Rafferty (in his last role) and the inevitable Jack Thompson people this desolation. It may be an outsider's view of Australia, but of all the films I saw it provides the strongest feeling of authenticity. It is often considered to be the picture which started the Australian film renaissance.

The six films which follow it on my list are all set in the past. Since they have been widely seen and discussed, I shall limit myself here to some personal reactions. According to Ken Watts, head of the Australian Film Commission, the achievement of these films lies in the fact that they have taught Australians to look at themselves. There had been a major slump in the film business, as far as box-office figures go, and this slump continues. The bright spots on the 1976 release schedule have been *Jaws*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and now *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Caddie*. For the first time in history, a few Australian films have successfully competed with foreign product on the home market.

The fact that their topics are all taken from the Australian past (which in any case isn't a very long one) cannot rationally be explained, except that this corresponds to a current trend. On television, too, *Power Without Glory*, a series set in Australia's adventurous past and based, vaguely and curiously, on the best-selling novel by socialist author Frank Hardy, describing a tycoon whose activities dominated Australian business in the 1920s and 30s, has gone on for 26 weeks with no let-up in sight. This may well be a good sign, inasmuch as it represents the stocktaking of a nation finally assuming autonomy and a sense of its own tradition. But the films thus created help little towards an understanding of Australia's present.

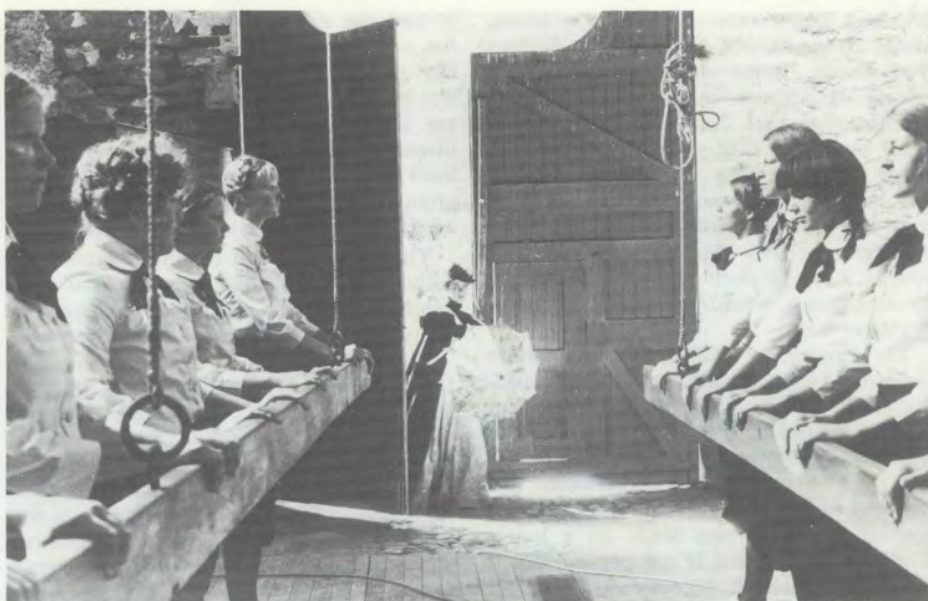
The best of this group of six films is *Caddie*, which is undeniably Australian and allows an insight into the depression years' social and human impact in a post-Victorian, still basically colonial society, recently independent. *Sunday Too Far Away*, another fair achievement, is the top of the iceberg for a large number of films dealing—throughout Australian film history—with the problems of men caught in small groups, remote from civilisation, in the business of

pioneering. There is very little heroism in these films, unlike their American equivalents; they are basically films of horizontal structure, of space, dust, friendship and loneliness. In *Sunday Too Far Away* the metaphor is sheep-shearing, and what emerges is man's innate instinct for competitiveness, raised to the level of art in this distant locality where normal human interaction ceases. On the surface, *Sunday Too Far Away* is the story of the birth of a strike—and in this sense it is historically correct—showing how the forces that drive these men into isolation and into dreaming of a nest egg simultaneously exploit their needs and their muscle power. But this film, too, is set twenty-five years ago, while there are no signs that the situation today is materially changed.

Picnic at Hanging Rock and *Devil's Playground* have become what must be considered cult objects in Australia. Their subject matters—Victorian small-mindedness and frustration—have been explored and attacked, albeit lovingly, by films from all countries throughout the seventy years which simultaneously contain their demise and the medium's history, and nothing particularly sets these films apart from many predecessors except the fact of their being set in Australia. The story of the school-girls lost on a summer outing, had it been told by an American or British director, and the restrictiveness of life at the seminary, had it been filmed by an Italian, perhaps Bellocchio, would hardly have caused a stir. But the mere fact that these films are of international quality, and thus not remarkable, speaks for them: to make 'normal', internationally saleable films is precisely what Australians want.

No doubt, in the direction by Peter Weir and Fred Schepisi, there is ability and the beginnings of style. But there was more of Australia in laborious and forgotten experiments such as Cecil Holmes' *Three in One* (1956) or Leslie Norman's *The Shiralee* (1957), which were never fortunate enough to be seen by a large public, even in Australia. Part of the success of the recent films, therefore, must be attributed to the public's readiness to accept them. There is an atmosphere that wishes them well. Which is not the same as quality, although it certainly does not preclude it.

A good example for this superficial but profitable acceptance system is *Mad Dog Morgan*, to which somebody in Cannes jokingly gave the prize as the best Western of the year. Philippe Mora is not the first to use the story of the rebellious outlaw, victim of British penal cruelty, for a film; back in 1911 Alfred Rolfe, one of the most prolific of the pioneers, had milked this myth with less effort in *Dan Morgan—Notorious Australian Outlaw*. But Dennis Hopper's bushranger is filmic: Mora makes him run through burning straw in wide-angle, camera joggling at his heels, and he distorts not only with lenses. It is all bigger than life, bigger than the myth itself, bigger than other movies, more expensive (proudly) and finally more disappointing. It is a film which could not have been made had not cruelty achieved such cinematic currency in recent years, and the victim aspect of the outlaw has become expediency, not sociology. Nevertheless, great fanfares at its festival opening, full-page interviews in the press,



'Picnic at Hanging Rock': Irma (Karen Robson) returns to the school. Photograph: David Kynoch



Above and below: 'Caddie': Helen Morse plays the heroine, a woman living in a Sydney suburb during the depression years



television exuberance. For Philippe Mora, whose *Swastika*, incorporating the famous Eva Braun home movies, represented Britain at Cannes in 1973, and whose *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* was a small masterpiece of documentary collage about the American depression, *Morgan* will hopefully remain a commercial side-step. His coming remake of the 1927 *For the Term of His Natural Life*, another convict story of deep sentimental concern for Australians, would benefit from a return to calmer ways.

The Trespassers is of a different calibre altogether. John Duigan has taken a landscape—favourite and important ingredient in any Australian film—and juxtaposed it with a psychological topography: the *terrain vague* of the relationship between two women, who encounter each other and the conflicts of their own souls on a lonely Victoria beach. Time is not pegged, but it must be the present, except that for once it doesn't matter. Sex, humour and emotions interact; in the end, an Australian work for once shows how little our inner conflicts depend on geography.

I saw other films: *The Singer and the Dancer*, Gill Armstrong's little masterpiece of personal rebellion, a true woman's film from a girl of great talent, and *Pure Shit*, a pompous rehash in re: hash, set among current city post-hippie losers. It seems that every country feels obliged to make at least one like this. Like the Canadian *High*, the film adds nothing to our knowledge of the country that produced it, except the least characteristic emulations of American and British social disasters. The sadder the fact that these films are made with great personal sacrifice and conviction.

Some Critical Conclusions

I have come away from Australia with an enormous feeling of goodwill. This bedevilled industry, after seventy years of trying, seems on the verge of assuming a certain position in world cinema. But I must say 'on the verge', because so far, from what I have seen, an 'Australian cinema' does not exist. That is why this article is called 'Films in Australia'. The magic ingredient is still lacking. I have tried to understand what it might be.

What strikes me most about films made in Australia is that they are not fighting films. There is no burning central concern, no real involvement with the epoch out of which they spring. The best ones are historical; and even relatively contemporary stories, with few exceptions, are set some twenty-five years back in time. And no sides are taken: where there are conflicts, these are merely stated.

Most countries with film industries, sooner or later, go through periods of filmic renewal. These occur, with some regularity, at schismatic junctures of social imbalance. Italian neo-realism, the French New Wave, the Québécois films in Canada and the brief cinematic flowering in Dubcek's Prague (to pick just a few obvious examples), all had certain things in common: their films cost less than traditional ones; they dealt with easily recognisable, everyday contemporary reality; they were fighting for free expression of repressed ideas, and for new, popular styles; and their spirit

echoed the struggles within their countries for renewal and for simplicity. It wasn't film-making that was important, but what was being said through films. The need to say something at all costs occurs when liberties are endangered or when a yoke has been thrown off. And being by nature a group effort, films benefit from moments when we feel there is a common cause.

The question is: in the current political, social, economic, psychological and geographical situation, do conditions exist in today's Australia for a real filmic renewal?

I have learned a great deal about Australia from the films I saw, but I have also learned something about the films from travelling 6,000 miles around Australia. The two experiences are illuminating in their contradiction. There is a sense of space in this landscape that I have never felt elsewhere, and a quality of light which seems unique in its brittle horizontality and transparency. A life rhythm results from these facts and from the great distance to elsewhere which I find hard to describe—in any case, it is only an intuition—but which, it would seem to me, is basically a non-filmic quality. Nothing in Australia can be shortened or abstracted, one has to hug the road in all its length, suck in the dust of all those miles, dig those deep, slow wells into the souls of the rare wanderers. And isn't the cinema, on the other hand, the craft that condenses, cuts corners, relies on essence, shortens and speeds our perceptions? Can one be the language of the other?

The distances, having become a psychological factor, must be at the base of a deplorable Australian habit: the constant need to relate to elsewhere, the inherent self-denigration. It has fouled more than one attempt in the past to refloat the impressive tradition of Australian cinema. The native talents—Errol Flynn, Merle Oberon, Peter Finch (an Englishman who started here) and others—left for bigger and better shores, and on home ground the drive, even today, seems to be towards the making of viable international films. Renewal, for today's Australian film-makers, means box-office. There is no question of an Australian style, native pride, a concern for the problems of the day. Sometimes one has the uneasy feeling that the habit of comparing themselves to others makes them want to make films like those others do.

'*Mad Dog Morgan*'. Photograph: Angus Forbes



A healthy concern for economic factors is a basic rule for this most expensive of the crafts. But if any rule at all can be derived from eighty years of film history, it is that in the final analysis box-office isn't that important. I am moving in perilous territory. I cannot, certainly, hope to define what an Australian film style could be. But apart from the films that I have seen, the Australian experience that I have had has a clear physiognomy: the country is unique and unspoiled (Gore Vidal, when he went there, is reputed to have said: 'I have visited the past, and it works'). One gets a feeling for the people and their link to this wide land. One can sense, feebly but clearly, the music of their union from so many origins, and the dissonances of their conflicts. There is, to say the least, a recognisable surface.

In the films I have seen (and I must repeat that I have only seen a few) the textures are not so easy to define. On the one hand, much is taken for granted, inasmuch as little is explained (all those sheep shearers and miners and truck drivers who gamble and drink beer—how did they get to this sociological dead end?); and for the Australian viewer, I suppose, these questions are redundant. But apart from the inescapable topography, only a very few stylistic dimensions are explored. And there is so much to draw on.

The name of the game, I think, is 'identity', and the relationship between a film-maker and his subject. There are many burning issues, from the treatment of the Aborigines to questions concerning the position of women, from geographical problems to the social ones which these cause. I may be wrong in making this statement so categorical, but I am convinced that a man offering to the viewer his own society, his own friends, his own material world and his conflicts with it, has more of a chance to find a response. So far, the pivotal issues have only been treated in short and personal films.

It is clear that certain steps towards the creation of a recognisable identity have been taken recently by films made in Australia, when compared with the historical material I have seen. The question is whether these steps are being taken consciously, whether a sense of identity, style, commitment and love, on a national level, is actively sought. Some of the many I have spoken to in Australia seem to recognise the need for such a search, but they have not always been the ones in command positions. Economically, there have been upsurges in Australian film history before. There is hope that this time there will be more than that. ■

Author's Note: I spent only seven weeks in Australia, and my views are limited by this short exposure. But I was lucky enough to meet and talk with many people who are actively involved with films in Australia. I am grateful especially to David Stratton, Erwin Rado, Ken Watts, Lachlan Shaw, Barbara Gibbs, Carol Hughes, Antonia Barnard, John Morris, Gill Armstrong, Philippe Mora, Richard Keys, Ron West, Arthur Karven, Gabrielle Godard, for providing information, help and hospitality, and I want to apologise to them if perhaps in this report I have not done justice to their enthusiasm. G.B.



BEYOND THE TASTE BARRIER

John Russell Taylor



The other day I went to a special preview of something called *The Big Sleeze*. It was specially imported from San Francisco, and was showing at the Nuart, West Los Angeles home of the trash movie—*Pink Flamingos* plays there at midnight every Saturday, *Thundercrack* every Friday, and should you happen to have missed *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *Tunnelvision* or *Mondo Trasho* you can pick them up scattered among Orson Welles and Bette Davis and Woody Allen. The point about *The Big Sleeze* was that, comfortingly, it turned out to be an evening totally misspent. It alternated trying to be feebly funny about the 1940s Chandler/Hammett private eye movie with fairly hardcore sex scenes labouring against the drawback of just about the most uniformly unattractive cast I have ever seen. The film is without wit or talent, and even lacks the courage of its own tastelessness.

Why, you might wonder, should I be so pleased to discover this. Mainly, I suppose, because I have been beginning to doubt my own sanity. That most of the big, respectable Hollywood films with pretensions to artistic quality have recently been boring is more or less to be expected. But even the modest smaller films with no special claims, movies like *The Shootist* or *The Bad News Bears*, have tended to produce somewhat negative and indeterminate reactions. And I find that instead the films which actually entertain me are *Jackson County Jail* and *The Pom Pom Girls* and worse—the films that not only do not claim to be art, but very resolutely claim not to be. There is of course a line to be drawn somewhere between the exploitation movie and the actual trash movie, but it is not always easy to know exactly where to draw it: often a lot depends on one's reading of the filmmaker's attitude to his creation and his motivation in producing it. For example, those who do not like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* mostly believe that Tobe Hooper and his colleagues from the University of Texas meant it as a straightforward blood-and-guts exploitation horror movie; those who like it think that it was meant to be funny, that it was, to borrow the advertising line on one of the classics of the genre, *Pink Flamingos*, 'an exercise in poor taste'.

There is also, naturally, the other small question of talent, but before I go into that I had better try to be more specific about what I mean by a trash movie. They occupy a *terrain vague*, not exactly commercial, not exactly underground, not exactly pornographic, but a bit of all. There is an element of deliberate defiance about them. Some films are trash by accident; these are trash by design. There is no doubt about who will cast the first stone, because it is going to be the film-maker himself. Technical crudities are often emphasised and delighted in. A sense of the ridiculous, which might be existential or Absurdist or merely campy, is never far from the surface. A distance is always preserved from the film's subject-matter, and there is a good deal of deliberate undercutting of one's own effects. Often the films have a frantic, frenetic quality, like silents played at sound speed; their jollity is manic, on the brink of desperation.

Top: George Kuchar and Marion Eaton in 'Thundercrack'.

Left: 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre'

On occasion, it seems that these qualities are the side-effect of commercial necessity. The film-maker has to work within a convention which he despises, to fulfil certain basic requirements of an exploitation movie, beyond which he can do what he likes. Presumably Larry Hagman's brief for *Beware! The Blob*, for example, was to make a follow-up to the original *Blob* with a sufficient number of action highlights in which the Blob crept up on characters and swallowed them whole. That provision being supplied, it did not matter so much what happened between the screams and the glugs. So, wilfully, Hagman recruited a selection of guest stars including Godfrey Cambridge and Shelley Berman, and played most of the lead-ins to the Blob's attacks for laughs. What makes *Beware! The Blob* quite a successful trash movie, though, is that the whole thing is not a send-up of its ostensible horror/science fiction genre. Instead, it has these violent dislocations of tone, from comedy to horror played fairly straight and back again—a sign, as I take it, that Hagman either totally despises his audience, or has a higher regard for the intelligence of his audience than he does for that of his distributors, or possibly both at the same time. He undercuts his own effects with a sort of like it or lump it perversity which is finally rather appealing.

It is often interesting to look at the first films of latterly very serious and respectable directors in this light. How serious, on any level, was Francis Ford Coppola with *Dementia 13* or Peter Bogdanovich with *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women*? It is no doubt a clue that both these productions came out of the Roger Corman fun factory where, a few years before, had been made what I regard as the most important of the forerunners of the trash movie, *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), *The Little Shop of Horrors* and *Creature from the Haunted Sea* (1960), all of course directed by Roger Corman himself. Corman had made perfectly seriously meant creature movies, crazed killer movies and suchlike, and was to make more of them. But it is as though, at that point in his career, a spirit of sheer devilment crept in, a curiosity about just how far you could go into the ridiculous without totally alienating your bread and butter audience. It is quite possible that many of the original audiences for these films failed to notice that they were absurd (if not even Absurd), that their dialogue often neared early Ionesco in its somnambulistic repetition of formulas, that they were parodying a set of conventions which might have seemed beyond parody.

Yet seen again today, the intent is very clear. The hero's mother in *Little Shop of Horrors*, with her powdered alum soup and the savings for her iron lung, clearly belongs to the same family as Edy the egg lady in *Pink Flamingos*, sitting in her play-pen and selecting her eggs from the eggman's display case with gourmet precision. Or there is the gangster's moll in *Creature from the Haunted Sea*, constantly being called upon for a song aboard the yacht while in the background the unmistakably rubber Creature snorts around and bears away stragglers. Or the two guys in *Bucket of Blood* putting on their beatnik act strictly for tourist squares. The defiance, the *je m'en foutisme* is there, the feeling of a private joke gone

public, like it or lump it. It is hardly surprising that these have become cult films for the man who likes *Thundercrack* or *Female Trouble*—and surely for their makers also.

There are other, rather more self-conscious progenitors of today's trash movies. The whole campy side of the American underground, for instance, as opposed (sometimes violently) to the more solemn side. Films like *Flaming Creatures* and *Sins of the Fleshapoids*, made out of gleeful devotion to Maria Montez and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* in all their resplendent (and unconscious) absurdity, join hands with the really messy films of Andy Warhol's middle period, when the transvestites and splinter groups from the Theatre of the Ridiculous and other similar off-off-Broadway companies had begun to move in, but before Paul Morrissey had put their house in order and made some structured sense of their efforts. They all love, and mock what they love. They all, while seeming at first glance totally involved in their subject-

Cockettes musical, but now there is no doubt that it is put together by professionals who know exactly what they are doing. The Cycle Sluts engage in the same sort of activities as did the Cockettes or the Flaming Creatures (muscular, bearded men in black silk women's underwear and beehive wigs), but their routines are choreographed to the last detail and their showbiz knowhow is such that they have even invaded such super-straight venues as the Playboy Club in Chicago. And Charles Ludlam's production of *Camille* in New York, with himself as a drag Marguerite Gautier, may begin as camp but ends up by affecting one in a surprisingly straightforward fashion, to the extent of being actually touching as well as funny. In other words—as hardcore survivors of the Woodstock generation see it, at least—what was once wild and free and off the wall has become ordered and corrupted and commercialised.

Which is again where the trash movie comes in. An important element in the true trash movie is cheerful cynicism. This is why it cannot really be considered as camp,



'Beware! The Blob': Gwynne Gilford, Robert Walker

matter, actually keep an (ironic? clinical?) distance from it.

Sometimes indeed, back in the 1960s, the effect was more spaced out than endistanced. Anyone who ever had occasion to sit through one of the extraordinary mixtures of outrage and tedium and simple fun which made up the musical shows of the San Francisco Cockettes will know exactly what I mean. Men dressed as women, women dressed as men, nude octogenarians, babies being breast-fed amidst the chorus line, material assembled with no flicker of critical sense as to what could work and what could not, and everything twisted and bungled and involuntarily transformed by a cast seeming so universally stoned that it was doubtful if they knew what they were doing two minutes together—it was extraordinary and compulsive, even if one could not help uncomfortably wondering from time to time whether it was not the contemporary equivalent of a social visit to Bedlam. And much the same spirit emanates from *Lonesome Cowboys*: everyone in the film seems to be having a high old time; it is only the audience who are left out in the cold.

In the live theatre, the 70s have brought more clarity and discipline and economy of effort. The scenario and score of *The Rocky Horror Show* could very well be those of a

even if it is often willing to sell itself as campy. For as Susan Sontag correctly remarks in her 1964 article 'Notes on "Camp"': 'In naive, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate and the naive.' This, properly applied, means that the film of *Myra Breckinridge* cannot be camp, but may well be an epoch-making essay in the big-budget trash movie.

It also means that *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* and Russ Meyer in general present a problem. If one has followed Meyer's career, one is left with two mutually contradictory feelings: (a) that he conforms with one of the important trash canons, in that he does not seem interested in the pornographic elements, but regards them as commercially required in order that he may have the freedom to do what he really wants; and (b) that his films are more camp than trash because he seems to have little cynicism—he probably takes his messages about Communism (*Vixen*), drug abuse (*Harry, Cherry and Raquel*) and sexual perversion (*Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*) with pathetic seriousness, a seriousness which signally fails. Or are we falling into the trap of our

own naiveté, failing to see that when we guffaw we are really meant to—much as, I believe, we are meant to see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as an outrageous black comedy? Interviews with Meyer suggest that he is laughing up his sleeve, but from the actual movies it is difficult wholly to believe that.

If we are looking for an alternative pigeon-hole to Camp for the trash movie, we can perhaps find one elsewhere in Susan Sontag's essay. She outlines an important 20th century (though not exclusively 20th century) sensibility in 'the kind of seriousness whose trademark is anguish, cruelty, derangement . . . Think of Bosch, Sade, Rimbaud, Jarry, Kafka, Artaud, think of most of the important works of art of the 20th century, that is, art whose goal is not that of creating harmonies but of overstraining the medium and introducing more and more violent, and unresolvable, subject-matter. This sensibility also insists on the principle that an *œuvre* in the old sense . . . is not possible. Only "fragments" are possible.'

Clearly one runs the risk of idiot pretentiousness to bracket *Pink Flamingos* with Rimbaud, Kafka and so on. And yet, if one forgets the lofty comparisons, the description does fit rather closely. Much that is otherwise inexplicable in trash movies does make sense if we regard it in terms of the impossibility of the *œuvre*. The typical Hollywood movie, even today, is preoccupied with pasting over the cracks to produce a semblance of *œuvre*—the film-maker continues to behave as though things make sense, as though traditional syntax still applies. But behind the façade one senses a failure of conviction, a crumbling and a hollowness. For John Ford things had not yet fallen apart, but for whom since? Surely the reason that Hitchcock alone of the established classics in Hollywood still manages to make films that work and that feel as though they belong to today is that he has never believed in an inherent logic in things—his cinema has always been built on sheer effrontery and manipulation of audiences; he has always made maximum creative use of his own cynicism, instead of trying to pretend that it did not exist.

But is cynicism enough? Just as all failed seriousness can be redeemed as camp, so not all cinematic cynicism can be ennobled into trash. An exploitation movie like *The Pom Pom Girls* is no doubt as cynical as they come, but its imagination does not soar any higher (or swoop any lower) than to make a quick buck; there seems to be nothing in it that really excited or amused its makers. Even *Hollywood Boulevard*, which does try to improvise freely and amusingly around its basic soft-core premise (a big-busted innocent comes to Hollywood and gets screwed every which way in the movie business), does disastrously lack the ideas and the sheer film-making knowhow to support a full feature's length.

No, the fine flower of trash blooms rarely. Even rather well-respected examples of the genre, like Robert Downey's *Putney Swope*, can be very wearing and tedious if they do not happen to strike you just right. A sense of trash is as subjective and unpredictable as a sense of humour. Some films may seem to some spectators to get themselves to-

gether into some kind of effective statement about the impossibility of getting things together, while to others they seem totally anarchic and pointless—and not even funny. My own favourites are *Female Trouble*, John Waters' latest, and *Thundercrack*, directed by Curt McDowell and written by George Kuchar, one of the twin film-makers who figured prominently in the New York underground of the 1960s. Both these seem to pass beyond the taste barrier, to get to the point where trash, in common with Susan Sontag's definition of Camp taste, 'turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment . . . to offer for art (and life) a different—a supplementary—set of standards.'

The plots of both films are, as they should be, virtually indescribable. In *Female Trouble*, the story of a woman which spans the decades from the 50s to the present, Divine, the giant transvestite heroine of *Pink Flamingos*, plays a girl who begins to go wrong when she runs away from home on Christmas morning because her parents fail to give her the cha-cha boots she craves. Later developments include roadside rape (performed by Divine herself in a daring character role as a man), unwed motherhood, marriage to a hairdresser who insists on remaining straight despite his mother's plaintive queries as to why he can't bring home a nice boy (the mother is Edy the egg lady, now poured into skin-tight black leather), and taking up by a weird beauty salon in which she passes for their finest creation, especially when hideously disfigured. The only proper end for all that, naturally, is the electric chair, which provides a spectacular finale to Divine's show business career.

John Waters likes a lot of plot, culled from B-movies of the 1950s and elsewhere, and worked by his fevered imagination into a bizarre and breathless mish-mash. George Kuchar (whose greatest admitted influence was from Republic black-and-whites) and Curt McDowell favour almost no plot at all. *Thundercrack* starts out in *Old Dark House* style with a dark and stormy night, an assorted group of strangers (four men, three women and a gorilla) stranded in a remote Victorian mansion, and a crazed hostess with her husband pickled in a jar and her monstrous son locked in the spare room. From there on it is a series of test situations which manage to get everyone together, sexually and socially, with everyone else before dawn brings everything to a rousing conclusion, with the marriage of the oddest man out to the gorilla of his choice.

The writing in *Female Trouble* is neither here nor there: Waters' forte is sheer idiotic invention and a talent for bringing qualities out of his actors which one would otherwise never guess at. Divine on stage, for example, is bizarre but otherwise unremarkable; in *Female Trouble* she gives a real performance, which against all the odds (mostly rigged by the deliberate perversity of the trash aesthetic) does work—there is a sort of *National Lampoon* insane consistency about her development from beehived teenager through scarred sex goddess to lady in the hot seat which ensures that through all the slap-happy parody a recognisable person does emerge. And it must be said also that Waters' period sense, at least during the last twenty years, is impeccable.

In *Thundercrack*, on the other hand, the scripting is a very important element. Though there is enough hard action (as they say) to please any porno buff, and it is all done *con amore* rather than as a trying necessity, the heart of the film, which runs nearly three hours, is a series of long, extravagant monologues written in a style somewhere between Tennessee Williams and *The Young Visitors*. Sometimes, indeed, the monologues and the action are simultaneous—nobody here seems to mind talking while they watch, and this crowding of the screen and the soundtrack does help to leave never a dull moment. The weird thing is that in spite of all the extravagance, the lurching, sickening changes of tone, the typical trash undercutting of effects, a lot of the film is genuinely touching, genuinely frightening and genuinely sexy (yes, even that is undercut). The film has another quality which is rather alarming in the best trash movies: one never quite knows whether the success is a happy accident or whether the makers really know what they are doing, whether one's own appreciation is straight or camp. But in this case, having seen the full version twice and a 90-minute version once, I feel certain that everything there is intentional—the relative ineffectiveness of the shortened version confirms the nicety with which the original is put together to say exactly what it wants to say, no more and no less.

But is it not, many people ask, a kind of perversity in the critic almost equalling the film-makers' own to be paying any serious attention to this kind of rubbish? To begin with, I doubt whether it is perversity to be paying serious critical attention to anything which seems to inspire or require it. And then, some critical guidelines seem to be necessary, since there is a considerable range of accomplishment within the genre—the question of what it is that makes *Thundercrack* so much superior to *The Big Sleeze* is well within the critic's province. And, of course, by ignoring this whole motley assortment of films one runs the risk of missing something really enjoyable in cinema, and genuine pleasures are rare enough to be snapped up wherever one may find them.

But whether it is finally important that one appreciates *Pink Flamingos* or not, I think it has become rather important that one appreciates the thinking behind it. The trash aesthetic affects many more significant film-makers than this small American lunatic fringe. You find the same sort of defiant, stop at nothing, everything but the kitchen sink attitude very frequently in Fassbinder, for example, even in his most solid, 'serious' films like *The Merchant of Four Seasons*. Some of Paul Morrissey's films—not so much *Trash* itself, but certainly *Women in Revolt* and the *Dracula* movies—have the same lightning switches of tone and style, the same disregard for normal canons of taste and relevance. Though all my wares be trash, the heart is true . . . sang the Elizabethan lyricist. Truth of the heart one can hardly guarantee in the modern trash movie-makers, but at least their minds are active, and sometimes they seem to be importantly plugged in to a specifically twentieth century connection, one which one can ignore only at the peril of a few nasty shocks in store.



Ross Care

CINESYMPHONY

Music and
Animation at the
Disney Studio
1928-42



It is within the exacting medium of animation—surely the most malleable and minutely controlled of film forms—that certain analogies between music and film become most discernible. Indeed, in animation a note-by-note/frame-by-frame comparison is not without validity in discussing both the creative processes and final results of attempts to merge the two media.

Some of the most effective and tightly integrated examples of visual/musical synthesis came from the Walt Disney studio between 1928 and 1942. During the 1920s, Disney's initial animated films—the Newman *Laugh-O-Grams* (1922–23), the *Alice* comedies (1924–27) and *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* (1927–28) series, and even the first two Mickey Mouse shorts—were produced as silents. As even these primitive works demonstrate, familiarity with the specialised demands of the silent film medium is invaluable for appreciating the impact and effect that sound, particularly music, may exert on the tempo of an isolated sequence or an entire film. Disney's experience in silent film production, combined with an innate appreciation of music's potential for structuring, contextualising and enhancing the overall appeal of his films, accounts for his studio's early integration of music as a vital component of their work, one to which was devoted as much attention and pre-production consideration as were expended on story and graphic elements.

Early in 1928 Disney produced the first Mickey Mouse short, *Plane Crazy*, as a silent, and set to work almost immediately on a follow-up, *Gallopin' Gaucho*. With his usual commercial acumen, Disney realised that with the advent of synchronised sound—*The Jazz Singer* had premiered in October 1927—the market for silent films would quickly dry up. Though dubious as to whether sound cartoons were feasible both from practical and economic standpoints, Disney none the less set Ub Iwerks (who had almost singlehandedly animated the first two Mickeys) to work on a scene from *Steamboat Willie* in July 1928. With a group composed of his brother Roy, and animators Iwerks, Wilfred Jackson, Johnny Cannon and Les Clark, Disney held a test screening of the scene along with music and sounds provided by those in attendance, their efforts miked and transmitted through a speaker placed behind the screen.

This session, primitive though it was, convinced Disney that the sound cartoon was a viable commodity. All that remained was to find a way to synchronise the sound-

track to the animated action. The mathematical basis of the two media provided the key, enabling Disney and his artists to devise and refine a process so sophisticated that an entire animated film and its complete soundtrack could be plotted in advance, and then produced and recorded separately, so as to result in a perfect union. Wilfred Jackson, who joined the studio in 1928 as an inker-and-painter and in-betweenner before becoming a fully fledged animator and one of Disney's most important directors, recalls his part in evolving the complex techniques which led to full synchronisation:

'I had been working at the studio only a short time when Walt told us he had heard about a method of recording sound on film while photographing actors on the set. He wondered in what way sound could be synchronised with cartoon action, and we all began to think of funny cartoon business based on music and noises to accompany the action. But there was one problem: drawings, unlike live characters, do not make noises while they are being photographed, and so some way of co-ordinating the sound with the animation had to be worked out.

'Walt told us he knew how fast the film is going to go: 90 feet a minute, or 24 frames per second. But he couldn't see any way to tell how fast the music would go. Now, when I was a child I was made to take piano lessons, but I stubbornly refused to practise so not much came of it. But I did learn the bare rudiments of music: beats, measures, key signatures, tempo, things like that. And I could laboriously read a melody line and play simple tunes on the harmonica, and

Top: 'The Band Concert'. Left: Walt Disney and composer Frank Churchill with the trio who supplied the voices of 'The Three Little Pigs'.

© Walt Disney Productions

I knew what a metronome was. So I brought one to work and showed it to Walt. I set the metronome at 60 and it ticked sixty times in a minute—one tick every twenty-four frames. I set it at 120 and got a tick every twelve frames. I could make it tick in any multiple of frames Walt wanted. Then I got out my harmonica and played 'Turkey in the Straw' while the metronome ticked away, and Walt could tell how fast the music was going.

'Walt had in mind a story about Mickey Mouse on a Mississippi riverboat, using the tune 'Steamboat Bill' as the theme for his first sound cartoon. He also thought that 'Turkey in the Straw' could be used in the picture. So I played the harmonica while the metronome ticked, and Walt visualised the action and timed it all out on the exposure sheet, a long piece of paper with spaces for the animator to write down the number that he also puts on each of his drawings. Now with sound in mind, we had to put some new instructions on the sheet. Along one side of the sheet, each measure and beat of the music was numbered and placed beside the space for the animator's number of the drawing for that frame of film. A description of the action to be drawn was written here beside the musical beats.

'Thus, each individual thing that was to happen in the picture was visualised and timed to the rhythm of the music before the animation drawings were made or the music itself written out in detail. Of course, it was not possible to pre-time all the action so perfectly. So, as the picture was being animated, some adjustments might have to be made as to which action was to fit what part of the sound. If some action needed more time, then some other bit of business would be shortened accordingly. But no animation was done other than as originally timed except with a suitable revision of the sound plan, so we knew that the picture and soundtrack, when finally done separately, would fit each other properly.'

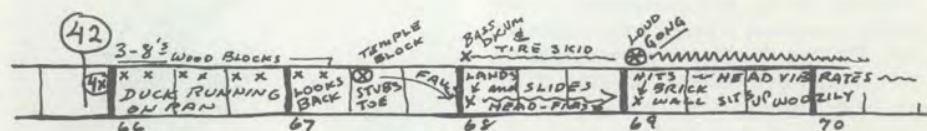
Besides introducing the metronome, Jackson also developed the dope sheet, or, as it later became known, the bar sheet. Essentially, this was a diagram of the sound and action for a whole picture, comprised not of a musical staff and score but of a series of horizontal spaces to indicate each measure and usually each beat of the music as well. Though the graphic formats of the bar sheets developed over the years, from the early hand-written sheets drawn by the short's director himself to more involved printed forms which could accommodate a variety of time signatures, and other even more complex formats, the one constant of the sheet was that it always included measures (indicated by numbers and heavy vertical lines) and usually beats (indicated by lighter vertical lines arranged according to the number of beats per measure).

Jackson further describes the bar sheet: 'Each measure was numbered and the beginning of each scene in the picture was indicated: as, so many frames before measure such-and-such. This way, after the individual cartoon scenes had been separately photographed and the entire score had been recorded, we would know where to cut each scene in against the soundtrack. Besides the measure and scene numbers, the tempo was indicated (as, 2-12s for two twelve-frame beats, etc.). The more

important action of the picture was written in, and a mark placed to show on which beat, or fraction of a beat, the sound should occur to synchronise with that particular action. Whenever a specific tune was planned, it was indicated and noted. The bar sheet was really a rather complete diagram of the sound and action planned for the entire picture.'

The accompanying illustration is an excerpt from the type of bar sheet which would have been prepared by a shorts director at the Disney studio during the mid-1930s.

The sheet indicates a tempo with three eight-frame beats per measure, a fast 'chase' tempo. Scene 42 begins four frames (4x) before the downbeat of measure 66. The scene is a pan-shot of Donald Duck running, his footsteps four frames apart (or two steps to each eight-frame beat). He stubs his toe on the second beat of measure 67, falls, hits the ground on the downbeat of measure 68, and slides into a brick wall, hitting it with his head on the downbeat of measure 69. As he sits up, his



head is vibrating dizzily. Wood blocks sync with his running footsteps until the temple block when he stubs his toe, then a bass drum as he lands flat, with a car tyre skidding sound as he slides and a loud, vibrating gong crash as he hits the wall, and which continues to ring as his head vibrates.

Jackson pointed out that post-scoring was also sometimes used at the studio, the practical requirements of the situation to be animated determining whether visuals or music should be completed first. A song or dance number, or any other sequence which might need the animated action to be perfectly synchronised to the musical beat, naturally dictated that the score be composed and recorded first, usually as a vocal-piano or solo piano track to be fully orchestrated later. When the animation involved non-metered action or a gag situation of prime importance, and demanded that the animator be at least partially free to establish his own timing and visual rhythms, the animation itself took precedence and was post-scored. However, during the 1930s, bar sheets were *always* used to show the editors where to cut each scene in against the sound, and where to place the dialogue and sound effects against the music tracks in either case. In post-scoring, the placement of picture to sound was indicated on the bar sheets in the same manner as in pre-scoring, and so the bar sheets always served as the diagram, or plan, of the animated picture for the cutters.

Thus even when sections of animation were done before the music was composed, such sequences were animated in a predetermined strict tempo. Measure numbers would be written on the bar sheets and on the animator's exposure sheets, even though the music had not yet been written, and the animator would conform to the prescribed rhythm with the placement of accents in his actions. An animator who had an under-

standing of music would make some effort to phrase his actions accordingly. In later years, particularly in the feature-length cartoons of the late 1940s and early 50s, as well as in many of the later shorts, post-scoring was frequently done to a 'free tempo' or 'free beat' format, particularly in sequences which involved extensive dialogue. Bar sheets were laid out in 16 frame beats for the convenience of the editors using their footage counters when working with the film (35mm film having 16 frames per foot), and measures and beats were not indicated on the charts until the music was completed. In all the later 40s and 50s work, bar sheet techniques and formats also differed from those adhered to in the 30s, depending on the director's interest in music as a prime element in the completed picture. Often during this later period the director would concentrate only on effective dialogue and sound effects, as opposed to the technique of the 30s which placed director and composer in close collaboration from the very start of production.

During the 1930s the finalised bar sheet

was the mutual creation of the animation director and the musical director/composer; these two also co-ordinated and placed the actual music itself, manipulating sound and visuals so that each would enhance the other. Before this, the story crew, working in conjunction with Disney and the picture's chief animators, would have finalised the plot elements. 'By the time Walt okayed the picture for animation,' Jackson recalls, 'everything in it had been thoroughly worked and re-worked so as to guarantee the best result. And the animators, who had been in on it every step of the way, were no strangers to it. At the Disney studio, the animator was king. Walt considered him the star performer of the team. All the careful pre-planning was done with the aim of preparing the material for the animators so as to help them accomplish their task better. The idea

Disney director Wilfred Jackson. © Walt Disney Productions



was *not* to dictate how they would time and draw their action, *nor* to exclude them from the creative part of making the cartoon.'

Jackson describes the co-ordination of action and music: 'First, the musician would suggest tunes for the various sections of the picture to fit the mood or general type of action for each part. He would patiently play the same phrase over and over again while the animation director visualised and timed the action in his mind. Working back and forth, the musician would sometimes change elements in the score to enhance certain actions, or the director would modify some piece of business so that it worked better musically. When both were satisfied, the director would mark the action down on the dope sheet while his partner sketched out that part of the music score. Then they would move on to the next little piece of action. At last, when the action all the way through the story had been pre-timed, a plan was achieved for both picture and sound. It was only after this timing had been finished, and after Walt had reviewed and okayed the plan, that the animators picked up their work.'

Needless to say, this painstaking process could be somewhat trying for the composer. Leigh Harline, the Disney musical director who composed the scores for some of the best Silly Symphonies, as well as for *Pinocchio* (which won Academy Awards for 'Best Song' and 'Best Score'), commented: 'Ordinarily, I have about three seconds in which to set the mood for a cartoon (compared to about thirty seconds for an ordinary dramatic picture). That imposes a task not always easy to do.' Though Harline's opinion was voiced in 1937 (during the preparation of some of the incidental background score for *Snow White*), the complaint was not a new one; in fact, this problem had helped to bring about the second of Disney's major shorts series, the Silly Symphonies.

Carl Stalling, a musician whom Disney had known in Kansas City, and who came to Hollywood in 1928 to become the studio's first official music director, reportedly became involved in heated discussions with Disney over the limitations imposed on his scoring by his employer's insistence on giving the animation pre-eminence over the music in the first Mickey Mouse shorts. As a result of these altercations and at Stalling's suggestion, a second series of shorts was conceived. In a *Funny World* interview, Stalling reminisced about the birth of the Sillys:

'After two or three of the Miceys had been completed, Walt talked with me about getting started on the musical series that I had in mind. At first he thought I meant illustrated songs, but when I told him that I was thinking of inanimate objects like skeletons, trees, flowers, etc., coming to life and dancing and doing assorted actions fitted to music more or less in a humorous and rhythmic mood, he became very interested. Concerning a name for the series, I suggested *not* using the words 'music' or 'musical', as they sounded too commonplace, but instead using 'symphony' together with a humorous word. At the next gag meeting—I don't know who suggested it—Walt asked me, "Carl, how would 'Silly Symphony' sound to you?" I said "Perfect!" I then suggested the initial subject, *Skeleton Dance*,

because ever since I was a kid, I had wanted to see real skeletons dancing.'

The division of Disney's 1930s output into two separate series meant that in the plot and gag-oriented character shorts the animation was given priority, while in the Sillys music was pre-eminent. The pre-production gestation period for a typical character short (e.g., a 'Mickey Mouse') was devoted mostly to developing story, gags and idiosyncratic situations. Such shorts as *Mickey's Orphans* (1931), *The Klondike Kid* (1932) and later, more technically refined pictures such as *Mickey's Garden* and *Mickey's Fire Brigade* (both 1935) are good examples of the studio's increasing attention to sustained plots and sophisticated comic business in projects which rendered music subservient. Though the scores of these films contributed much to their total impact, music served primarily as background for the choreography of action and characterisations; should any element in the short's construction require modification in the interests of a more fluid



Compulsive music-making: 'The Band Concert'

continuity, it was usually the music which bore the changes. (At times, the methods devised for the two series overlapped: many of the Mickey shorts—including *Steamboat Willie* (1928); *Just Mickey* (1930), actually a virtuoso study in pure animated characterisation, the 'plot' of which consists of nothing more than a violin solo performed by the Mouse; and *The Band Concert* (1935)—relied heavily or even entirely on musical premises.)

The Silly Symphonies, of course, *always* derived from a musical concept, and every attempt was made to accommodate the music score's development and realisation in the most expressive manner. Early shorts in the series, including the original *Skeleton Dance* (1929), were minimally plotted at best, designed rather to showcase the novelty of animated figures performing in perfect time to a specially composed or adapted musical score (this representing a step up from the practice of simply superimposing music on to a completed cartoon which had otherwise been conceived and produced as a silent).

Many of the earliest Miceys and Sillys admittedly did little more than exploit their visual/musical pairings, but as the initial novelty wore off Disney and his story-men evolved more sophisticated methods for co-ordinating image and sound while maintaining in the Sillys an emphasis on fluid, cohesive scoring. *The Bird Store* (1932) neatly combined the animusical set-piece format with a simple but clearly structured

story-line: at first merely a succession of loony sight-gags and caricatures synched to appropriate music and sound effects, the film abruptly and economically establishes and resolves a conflict in which the bird characters are forced to rescue one of their number from the clutches of a hungry kitten who ventures into the shop for a free dinner.

The first Technicolor Silly Symphony, *Flowers and Trees* (1932), conformed more or less to the same pattern, but added a bastardised classical score featuring excerpts from Rossini, Schubert and Anton Rubinstein. Besides providing ample opportunities for imaginative animation, this half-and-half structure also served a functional purpose: since each Silly introduced a set of hitherto unknown characters, the meandering musical first-halves allowed an audience time to empathise with these new personalities before the 'plot' itself took over.

As the Sillys moved through their Golden Age from 1932 to 1939, they displayed countless inventive variations on the basic formula. From essentially simple, not specifically music-oriented shorts such as *Autumn* (1930), *The Fox Hunt* (1931), *The Bears and the Bees* and *Babes in the Woods* (both 1932), some Symphonies moved on to become



'The Whoopie Party'. © Walt Disney Productions

virtually self-contained, one-act operettas. In some of these, the dialogue was entirely sung: e.g., *The Pied Piper* (1933), which presented the studio's early experiment with animation of the human form and a charming Harline vocal/instrumental score, and the less successful *Goddess of Spring* (1934), a near-operatic opus which anticipates the use of music in *Snow White* and is another, more 'realistic' experiment in human animation. In others, a basic theme song was woven into an orchestral, often ballet-like score, with dialogue spoken rhythmically (much in the manner of an operatic recitative) and/or written as rhymed, metered verse. The very popular *Three Little Pigs* (1933) and *The Grasshopper and the Ants* and *The Big Bad Wolf* of 1934 illustrate these techniques.

A somewhat less cohesive alternative to both these plot-oriented formats involved using the cartoon short as a basis for several musical 'spots', each allotted its own individual musical turn. This form of Silly drew its inspiration both from vaudeville and (more importantly) ballet; as regards the latter, these Sillys were quite similar to the *divertissement* (or set of character dances) in the classical Russian ballet, in which plot comes to a standstill to make way for a series of colourful, set-piece dances. Certainly the ballet is yet another art which initially influenced Disney's style of animation; his

animators, many of whom were accomplished musicians, also served as excellent choreographers. Kurt Weill, who dubbed the animated cartoon 'another important stepping-stone toward a truly musical film,' said of Disney's work: 'Here is music that is actually written first, [with] the characters "animated" to the rhythm and accent of [that] music. The cartoon is the "ballet" among the different forms of movie entertainment, and some of the scores written for Disney's pictures are fine examples of popular ballet music.'

Countless Disney shorts throughout the 1930s could be cited as proof of this, from *Skeleton Dance* onwards, for in his films' affinity to the dance and ballet Disney discovered an essential facet of his art, one which, once acknowledged, demanded only refinement. In both the Mickeys and the Sillys of the late 1920s and early 1930s, characters would burst into rhythmic movement at the drop of a hat, often accompanied by their hats and any other inanimate objects which the animators' imaginations cared to have join the dance. One of the most memorable of the Mickey shorts from this period is *The Whoopee Party* (1932) in which, seduced by the compulsive music-making of Mickey and Minnie, the very



'Music Land'. © Walt Disney Productions

parody of the typical Hollywood night-club musical of the 30s, comprised of three meticulously choreographed animated production numbers—a wild introductory rag, a spider-web *pas de deux* between the web's inhabitant and a seductively female fly, and a finale in which the café's bug-band cavorts through a wild version of 'Everybody's Truckin'. Perhaps the ultimate fruition of the trend was reached in *Fantasia*'s 'Nutcracker Suite' sequence, which is an actual ballet divertissement. (Interestingly, this sequence was originally conceived as a Silly Symphony to be entitled 'Ballet des Fleurs'.) Writing as the dance critic of the *New York Times*, John Martin commented that Art Babbitt's exquisite Chinese Dance from the 'Nutcracker' segment was 'infinitely superior to the original choreographic version' of the

piece. The link between Disney's animation of the period and the ballet is further evidenced by the fact that three of the Ultimate Silly Symphony's eight compositions—'Nutcracker Suite', 'The Rite of Spring' and 'Dance of the Hours'—are ballet scores, and that the concept for the 'Pastoral Symphony' section was initially inspired by Pierné's little-known ballet, 'Cydalèse et le Chèvre Pied', a choice which, unfortunately, proved too relentlessly energetic to sustain the story and situations developed for that sequence.

As prolific as was the output of Disney shorts during the 1930s, there was remarkably little repetition in their format and execution. Two of the best, *Music Land* (1935) and *The Old Mill* (1937), stand alone for the brilliance of their execution, related to the other shorts in the series only by virtue of the seamless integration of the musical and the visual which characterised all the best work in the series, and to each other only because of the sensitive contributions made by director Wilfred Jackson and composer Leigh Harline, the team who had also been responsible for such films as *Lullaby Land*, *The Pied Piper*, *The Grasshopper* and *The Ants*, *Water Babies*, *Mickey's Garden* and *Woodland Café*.

Music Land springs direct from a musical concept, being a subtle satire of symphonic jazz, and disclosing a Romeo and Juliet fable of the conflicts which arise when a Princess from the Land of Symphony, a violin, falls in love with a Prince from the Isle of Jazz, a saxophone. Actual spoken dialogue is completely eschewed, the characters 'speaking' only by means of the sounds of their respective musical instruments which, when combined with the gesticulations and pantomime actions of the animated characterisations, produce remarkably comprehensible results. For the film's finale, Harline provides an Ivesian, almost *avant-garde* flourish to depict the polyphonic battle between pipe organ (playing Wagner!) and jazz band which musically illustrates the warring factions.

Of all the Sillys, it is *The Old Mill* which is most anticipatory of *Fantasia*, in that it is



'Woodland Café'. © Walt Disney Productions

chairs, tables, assorted household items and ultimately the house itself turn terpsichorean. *The Whoopee Party* (and many other animated shorts of the period, including many non-Disneys) demonstrates how perfectly suited the medium of animation would be for realising the Ravel/Colette one-act opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1925), with its agitated teacups, armchairs, trees and musically howling cats. (When Ravel's brother viewed *Snow White*, he allegedly commented: 'This is how my brother's opera should be done.' In fact, a Silly entitled *Lullaby Land* (1933) bears a narrative somewhat similar to Ravel's *fantaisie lyrique*.)

Other divertimento-styled shorts of the early 1930s include *Mother Goose Melodies* (1931), re-filmed as *Old King Cole* in 1933, both depicting a bevy of nursery rhyme personalities who spill out of their respective books to mount a performance of musical turns; *Funny Little Bunnies* (1934), which delineates the Technicolored antics of a troupe of musically inclined Easter rabbits; and the above-mentioned *Lullaby Land*, an illustration of the way in which a plot and its attendant moral could be grafted on to the divertimento format.

The climax of this direction for the Sillys came with one of the last in the series: *Woodland Café* (1937), a relatively plotless

Looking forward to 'Fantasia': 'The Old Mill'. © Walt Disney Productions



entirely structured in conjunction with Harline's orchestral/choral score which, in its pantheistic lyricism, evokes Delius. As such, the short is a wordless, nearly plotless aural/visual tone poem, a sustained piece of cinematic Impressionism which records the changing aspects of a single environment—the interior and surroundings of an abandoned windmill—during the course of a calm evening, stormy night and placid dawn. Besides the sheer musicality of the film's pacing and editing—the storm sequence being a veritable textbook lesson on the use of beautifully scored montage techniques—*The Old Mill* is noteworthy for its introduction of the three-dimensional effects of the multiplane camera (not to mention some of the most elegant and intricate 'flat' camerawork seen in a Disney film up to that time) and virtuoso special effects.

It would be inexcusable to conclude this introduction to the music in Disney's films without some mention of his major composers and music directors during this period. Carl Stalling composed the music for the first twenty Disney sound cartoons (with the exception of *Steamboat Willie*) before leaving the studio to work briefly with Ub Iwerks, who had earlier made his (temporary) departure from Disney's. Stalling later worked at Warner Brothers, where he composed the scores for over 600 cartoon shorts. He was replaced at Disney's by Bert Lewis, who was joined in 1931 by Frank Churchill, who in turn was joined in 1932 by Leigh Harline. It was Churchill and Harline who scored most of the shorts during the 30s, at times assisted by Paul Smith (who later applied cartoon scoring techniques to Disney's *True Life Adventure* nature series), Al Malotte (who as Albert Hay Malotte went down in musical history as the composer of the definitive, ubiquitous musical version of 'The Lord's Prayer'), and Oliver Wallace (who would later collaborate with Churchill on the marvellous score for *Dumbo* in 1941, and provide the background incidental scores for many of Disney's later animated features).

Of the Disney studio composers, only Leigh Harline was to make his mark elsewhere. Leaving Disney's to freelance in 1941 (after winning the double Oscar for *Pinocchio*), Harline scored a variety of films, including *The Boy with Green Hair*, *I Married a Communist*, *Pick-up on South Street* and *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao*. He also provided the score for Max Fleischer's feature-length *Mr. Bug Goes to Town* in 1941. Frank Churchill's career was cut short by his untimely death in 1942.

The advent of feature production brought to a close the Silly Symphony series. Artistic techniques which had been cultivated for the shorts were now placed in the service of the musical sequences in the features. (The closest thing to a revival of the genre came in the mid-1940s with the feature-length anthologies of musical interludes, such as *Make Mine Music* and *Melody Time*.) Though the influence of the Sillys was most obviously felt in Disney's third feature, *Fantasia*, each of the studio's first six features directly benefited from the artistic and technical ground broken by the Sillys, while simultaneously revealing a development of their own: thus the operetta ambience of Churchill's *Snow White*, with

its deliberately placed songs and musical numbers, gives way to the more tightly integrated brilliance of Harline's complex of songs, leitmotifs and orchestral incidental music for *Pinocchio*, and culminates in the refinement of *Dumbo* and *Bambi* (1942). Though the two latter scores (primarily the work of Churchill) differ almost to the point of being antithetical, they nevertheless mesh songs and background score with plot and *mise en scène* to transform the films into aural/visual tapestries of inextricable synthesis. For *Bambi* in particular, Churchill's collaboration with associate composer Edward Plumb, orchestral arrangers Charles Wolcott and Paul Smith (all three men would later supervise the electric music for *The Three Caballeros*, released in 1945), choral arranger Charles Henderson and conductor Alex Steinert, resulted in one of the most sophisticated scores ever concocted for a Hollywood film, and one which suggests that it is *Bambi* rather than *Fantasia* which represents the style of the Silly Symphonies at its most refined.

In little more than a decade, Disney and his staff brought the animated musical film to a level of creative and technical brilliance which remains a touchstone by which other endeavours in the field may be measured. Though the films' success owes as much to the talents of his musical collaborators as to those of his graphic and story artists, Disney achieved his goal of total synthesis in such a way as to make distinctions between the various contributions of his staff practically meaningless. The result is perhaps best summed up by Wilfred Jackson.

'In our minds as we were working on the pictures at the studio, I do not believe there was much thought given to the music as one thing and the animation as another. I believe we conceived of them as elements which we were trying to fuse into a whole new thing that would be more than simply movement plus sound. It was always a team effort, a pooling of the talents of all into what *anyone* was doing. Far more of Walt went into those cartoons than came out of any of the rest of us, but it was not a one man show by any means. It definitely was, however, a very exciting and rewarding thing to work with such a group of extremely talented and creative artists, all pulling together to reach a common goal. Not for any one of us to show what a great thing I could do, but to try to do the thing *we* were doing to the best degree that we knew how.'

'*Pinocchio*' (1940). © Walt Disney Productions



Clockwork Violence from page 24

technology, isn't always a positive force, but rather is amoral or neutral, to be employed wisely or unwisely depending upon the society. The government has forgotten that cinema should be a source of pleasure and entertainment, and so it is perverted to serve destructive aims uninformed by human kindness. Technology serves the traditional function of protecting the government and social harmony, but its mechanical manipulators resemble their tools in their unfeeling regard for human creatures.

In each movie, irrational but fundamental human violence is juxtaposed with or encased in the most formal ritual or latest technological marvel. Technical knowledge or rules of behaviour governing the formal or technological superstructure are well known. All that is missing is self-knowledge, or awareness of the persistence of the core of savagery in man.

Kubrick holds no Pollyanna view that a good upbringing eliminates the violent impulse. Though Alex's cruelty can be pinned on permissive parents and a corrupt society, and Bullingdon's viciousness is partly the product of smouldering resentment, little Brian, Barry's affectionate son, could have grown up to be equally violent. His cherubic face lights up when Barry throttles Bullingdon, and he takes similar pleasure in listening to morbid war stories. Not only do he and Alex and Barry's army cohorts (who encourage his brawl) enjoy 'doing it or watching it', but we too might have a perverse attraction for violence, at least the clockwork violence of the screen, though we are loath to admit it.

With each new film, Kubrick becomes more precise and definite about the central irrational urge for violence, the unpredictable threat to the complacent and superficially stable social order. The astronauts are impassive, but violence surfaces in their computer. We can assume that Alex joins the government, but the formerly pacifist writer and victim seizes a knife to settle his score. *Lyndon* ends with the allusion to the French Revolution, or the outburst of the violent energy of all the untitled and disgruntled.

From 2001 to *Lyndon*, Kubrick also becomes increasingly pessimistic. The awesome enigmatic Star Child of 2001 has grown up to become vicious Alex, callous Bullingdon, and the pampered but nevertheless violence-prone Brian. Each society has addressed human violence by creating elaborate artificial structures to fix it as rigidly as clockwork. Kubrick wants us to recognise our violent past intelligently to plan our future: we can only become more like the Star Child by first understanding how much like the apes we still are. Kubrick argues not with discursive tools, but with images, and his meaning is comprehensible only by noting the clash between a brawl shot with a handheld camera and a carefully composed image of an orderly cosmos. We can also notice their juxtaposition as an uneasy, imperfect union as stylised violence, ritual duels and mechanical wars. Kubrick insists that we must tame the ape in us if we are to attain an order that is not as superficial, fleeting and illusory as coloured images flashing on a screen.



'The Gordon Highlanders Leave for the War'

Primitive Propaganda

The Boer War Films

Elizabeth Grottle Strebel

It was the Boer War of 1899–1901 that gave the cinematographer one of his first opportunities to serve as a war correspondent and propagandist. A number of cinematographers actually travelled to South Africa to gain on the spot documentation, while others contented themselves with producing rather authentic looking 'fakes' and obviously staged propaganda vignettes. The films which resulted, shot exclusively from the British point of view, since the Boers had photographers but no cinematographers, are remarkable documents of the times, undoubtedly more revealing of Victorian England than of South Africa, full of the myths and symbols of British imperialist iconography.

'The Gordon Highlanders Leave for the War', 'Entry of the Scots Guards into Bloemfontein', 'Cronje's Surrender to Lord Roberts', 'Bombardment of Mafeking', 'Set-to Between John Bull and Paul Kruger', 'Kruger's Dream of Empire' are a few of the hundreds of one-reelers which abound from this period. Unfortunately, relatively little Boer War film footage has survived to the present. Some of the raw negative shot in South Africa never even reached England. Some 5,000 feet or 50–80 films were lost when the Boer General Christiaan de Wet exposed tins of captured negative on the veld at Roodeval.¹ More films were lost

when a ship transporting them sank off the Cape.

Many films did of course reach England, and ultimately the rest of the Empire, to whet the imperial appetite. Boer War films were shown regularly at the Palace Theatre of Varieties in London, and the Warwick Trading Company Catalogue of July/August 1902 listed no fewer than 111 films pertaining to the 'Transvaal War'. Merely a handful of the films can be found in archives today, but image analysis of these alone is highly revealing.² Moreover, it is possible to examine the content of those films which have disappeared using the very detailed des-

criptions available in the distributors' catalogues of the period.

There were three major British companies, British Mutoscope and Biograph Co., R. W. Paul and the Warwick Trading Company, which launched a full scale effort towards the production of Boer War films. A number of other companies can be said to have dabbled in them, including Pathé, the Hepworth Manufacturing Company, Gaumont, Gibbons, John Wrench & Son and Edison in the U.S.A. The competition amongst these companies was fierce. In advertising its films, the Warwick Trading Company celebrated its representatives Joe Rosenthal and Edgar M. Hyman as the unique 'official' cinematographic war correspondents in South Africa and admonished: 'Do not discredit your exhibits and the general animated picture business by trying to fool the public with faked films. You will be the loser in the long run if you do. The Warwick war films of topical events from all parts of the world are taken on the spot and are not made on Hampstead Heath, New Jersey, France or in somebody's back garden.'³

There was a definite obsession with veracity regarding these early films. Even the 'fakes' were painstakingly executed to give the aura of authenticity, which no doubt accounted for the elaborate counter-propaganda by the Warwick Trading Company. Thomas Edison, shooting all his Boer War series in the Orange Mountains of New Jersey, was particularly adept in this respect. Once while Edison was filming a scene of the Battle of Spion Kop, a cannon was accidentally fired prematurely and two of the star actors were seriously hurt. In the *British Journal of Photography* (April 20, 1900) it was concluded that the incident would 'doubtless add unexpected realism to the scene.'

To heighten the sense of realistic participation, one enthusiastic London showman projecting Boer War and Chinese Boxer Rebellion films even went so far as to set off blank cartridges in the theatre. The cartridges cost him half a crown for a hundred, but he argued that the smell of powder, and the natural haze which ensued, made it well worth the effort. (*The Showman*, September 6, 1901.)

Most celebrated, of course, were the cinematographers who followed the troops into battle. One of the more colourful was William Kennedy Laurie Dickson of the Mutoscope and Biograph Company, whose diary *Biograph in Battle* (1901) is a fascinating account of the vicissitudes faced by the wartime film-maker in those early days. Dickson, who had previously been Edison's assistant for seventeen years in America, left for South Africa just after the outbreak of war. He sailed on the *Dunottar Castle* along with General Buller, his troops and, incidentally, the correspondent for the *Morning Post*, Winston Churchill. Dickson's departure was heralded in the popular magazine *Today* (October 26, 1899): 'In both the

¹ Warwick Trading Company Catalogue, 1901.

² The author is grateful to Mr. De Lange of the S.A. National Film Board in Pretoria for arranging screenings.

³ Warwick Catalogue, 1901. Page 52 of this catalogue provided a facsimile of the official list of war correspondents, in which Rosenthal and Hyman featured as the sole cinematographers.

Graeco-Turkish and the recent Sudan Wars the camera played an important part in recording the episodes of battle. But no photograph can boast the realism of the biograph... The biograph will reveal bravery as no despatch may do, and will tell the truth in all things, owing neither loyalty to chief nor submission to esprit de corps. How far this truthfulness will please the authorities remains to be seen.' Indeed, Dickson complains bitterly in his autobiographical account about certain higher-ups who go unnamed who hampered his efforts to shoot footage, despite General Buller's written approval.

Dickson accompanied General Buller in the assault on Ladysmith, participating fully in the life of the troops, pitching tents, braving the elements, eating tinned bully beef or sometimes nothing at all, dodging shell fire, transporting the wounded by stretcher after the Battle of Spion Kop, ultimately contracting the ubiquitous enteric fever. In addition, he had to lug around by Cape Cart all his biograph equipment, which was particularly heavy and weighed over a ton. (Rosenthal, of the Warwick Company, had an easier time of it in that his camera equipment weighed less than three-quarters of a ton and could be transported on the back of a single mule.) Needless to say, the

business of picture taking was often trying at best. As Dickson himself describes in his diary: 'Just then I heard the 6-inch Boer guns roar, but having previously timed the landing of the shells I knew that I had two or three seconds to get a snap—which I did, then dived behind the rock followed by a sound so terrible that it is enough to make one's blood curdle—the bursting of a six-inch melinite shell at close range. The moment I heard the explosion I was up and snapped it. This I repeated several times; then, as the shells were bursting within two hundred yards of our rock and things were getting altogether too hot to be pleasant, I crawled back—not, however, before I had snapped the position I was in, for the sake of the unbeliever.'

There were essentially two types of Boer War films, the raw documentaries and the staged propaganda films. Of course, even the raw documentaries served as propaganda through selection, omission and emphasis. Revealing lacunae in visual documentation, to take up on Marc Ferro,⁴ in this case included the absence of film footage on the concentration camps or on the razing of farms and crops, etc. The actual choice of subject matter is just as illuminating.

One is struck by the proliferation of films of troop movements, embarking at Southampton, disembarking at Capetown, marching out to the front.⁵ To us, a stationary camera fixed on a line of helmeted troops striding single file up a gangplank appears at first glance to have little interest. But for the Victorian public, such images held a deep attraction. The succession of the various colonial regiments underscored the solidarity of the Empire. The uniforms, the generals, the very physical bearing of the men served as an expression of Imperial confidence. Often the camera was positioned close enough to the troops to achieve true portraits, and the Victorian public flocked to the theatres hoping to catch a glimpse of a friend or loved one who had just left for South Africa. Dickson, for one, grasped the expressive potential of the medium close-up. Although none of his films remains, reproductions of some of his embarkation frames have survived showing, for example, the development of a smile on the face of a 'Tommy' as 'an interesting study in expression'.⁶

There was a marked scarcity of actual battle scenes in Boer War film footage. Paul's *Bombardment of Mafeking* and *Wrecking an Armoured Train* were reproductions staged under the supervision of a military officer from the front. Warwick's *A Skirmish with the Boers near Kimberley* by a *Troop of Cavalry Scouts attached to General French's Column* (Warwick 5545) is then a rare example of an actual military confrontation. This film is described in the Warwick

catalogue of April 1901: 'These pictures produce a stereoscopic effect and the clear atmosphere gives a tremendous depth, enabling one to see thousands of troops in the distance, fighting at the base of a Kopje, while the dust arising from the galloping cavalry lends further realism to this splendid subject.'

Logistically, the filming of battle scenes was extremely difficult, as we have seen from Dickson's diary. Then, too, the nature of the fighting did not lend itself to cinematography, as the Boers with their guerrilla tactics tended to hide in the hills. Conveniently enough, however, the cinematographer's logistical difficulties spared the Victorian public from most of the true horrors of war and served to preserve traditional notions of heroism, chivalry and honour with regard to warfare.

Films of non-battle work scenes, like *The Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers Digging Trenches at the Orange River* (Warwick 5507b) and *Wash Day in Camp* (Warwick 5647), contributed to the notion of doing one's duty in a civilised fashion. Even the films of river crossings, a number of which have survived, though designed to show the difficulties of the terrain, were no doubt chiefly appreciated for their graphic appeal, especially when the Royal Engineers War Balloon was present. In a river crossing sequence preserved in the South African film archives (the river is most likely the Vaal), we see a succession of wagons drawn by struggling teams of oxen, up to their necks in water, spurred on by Zulu drivers with enormous long whips, all seemingly very romantic for an urban London audience.

Naturally, one of the very popular subjects for British cinematographers was the surrender scenes—Bloemfontein, Kroonstad and the dramatic flag-raising ceremony at Pretoria. Documentary footage of the Boers themselves was relatively scanty and consisted essentially of shots of captured Boer prisoners. One remarkable film which has survived is *Cronje's Surrender to Lord Roberts*. This record of the capture of the famous Boer General was made by a complete amateur, an officer working for R. W. Paul's company. In the film, the camera is trained on an open stretch of veld. Three C.I.V.s cross to the left, followed by a horse-drawn cart. There the General sits peering out at the camera in amazement. The cart is followed by an escort of C.I.V.s.

Other footage of Boer prisoners, which has since been lost, was of the transport of prisoners to India. One such film was *A Detachment of Boer Prisoners arriving and detraining at Attamadagar*. According to the description in the Warwick catalogue, one saw 'a special train with heavily barred windows drawing up at the station. The armed guards then open the carriage doors, taking the precaution to open only one at a time, in order to prevent all chances of an attempted escape. The prisoners are seen detraining, some looking very dilapidated, and having no shoes on their feet...' Here is a rare bit of tarnish on the Imperial image.

Documentary footage on the war wounded could at first glance be evidence of further tarnishing. A description of a film of a hospital ship in the Warwick catalogue refers to the 'dark sides of war'. Yet most filming

Actuality: Cronje's surrender, filmed by an army officer. Propaganda: John Bull (in white, seconded by Uncle Sam) is set on from behind by Kruger, whose seconds are Russia and France. Fake: film of an attack on a British Red Cross tent



⁴ In his article '1917: History and Cinema', *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 4, 1968, Ferro raises the whole problem of distortion through gaps in visual documentation.

⁵ Sample titles are *Troops Boarding the SS. Braemar Castle* (Warwick Catalogue No. 5469), *New Zealand Mounted Rifles from the Docks* (Warwick 5548), *The Australian Mounted Rifles Marching through Capetown* (Warwick 5526), *Embarkation of the Scots Guards* (R. W. Paul).

⁶ 'Cinematograph and Biograph Pictures', Supplement to *Today*, November 23, 1899.

of the wounded tended to emphasise the heroic element rather than the tragic. The Warwick catalogue description of its film *Ambulance Corps at Work* (5524b) clearly illustrates this point. 'After the Modder River engagement, the many wounded lying on the battlefield were picked up by this splendid ambulance corps who dash from one to the other, carrying and depositing the men in the ten-mule team.'

If through selection, omission and emphasis the raw documentaries constituted a certain form of propaganda to boost the morale of the home population, the propaganda of the staged films which were made far from the veld was much more blatant. A look at the various images and symbols of these crude propaganda films is highly revealing of the whole imperialist ethos.

As seen in these films, the British Tommy was intended to be fighting for a trinity of God, Motherhood and Country. In a typical sentimental film by Paul, *His Mother's Portrait or the Soldier's Vision* (described in the catalogue *Animated Photograph Films*), a C.I.V. is seen parting from his aged mother. She gives him, as a memento, a framed portrait of herself, which he kisses and puts in his breast pocket. The scene switches to the open veld where we find the soldier wounded and staggering for help. He faints and has a vision of his mother praying on bended knee. He is discovered by Red Cross attendants, and it is found that his wound is not serious, the bullet having been deflected by the mother's portrait.

If the British are ever heroic and duty bound, the Boers are portrayed as complete villains. A film of a bombing of a Red Cross tent, which has survived, seeks to promote the idea of the Boer atrocity. This very authentic-looking 'fake' shows a tent pitched on the veld, the Red Cross flag fluttering prominently to the left of the screen. A hurled bomb lands right outside the tent but fails to go off. A second bomb reaches the mark and goes off, underscoring the Boer treachery by intimating that it was no accident. Wounded and Red Cross nurses stagger out of the tent in disarray.

Paul Kruger, President of the Boer Republics, is the embodiment of evil in these films, completely lacking in morals or a sense of justice. In the film *Set-To Between John Bull and Paul Kruger*, which can be seen in the archives, Kruger and John Bull are seen in two rounds of a boxing match. In round two Kruger begins to engage in foul play. He kicks John Bull, waves a white flag and hits Bull from behind while his back is turned.

In a number of films, Kruger is made out to be an imperialist with insatiable aspirations, in a classic example of psychological projection. In an R. W. Paul film, *Kruger's Dream of Empire*,⁷ Kruger appears in a room with a large canvas with the inscription 'On Majuba Day the British were Defeated'. (The Battle of Majuba Hill, in which the British were completely routed by the Boers in the first Boer War of 1881, is alluded to in a number of films as a sore point, a day to be avenged.) Rubbing his hands and

chuckling, he settles in a chair for a nap. He then dreams that his enemy Joseph Chamberlain offers him the Crown of England, but as he jumps up to grab the crown it vanishes in a puff of smoke. Chamberlain then points to the canvas, whose inscription now reads 'On Majuba Day Cronje Surrendered'. Kruger lunges at his tormentor, but the latter vanishes as mysteriously as the crown. Kruger then turns to find that a pedestal which formerly bore a bust of himself now boasts one of the Queen of England. He attempts to knock it down but is restrained by four men in khaki who envelop him in a large Union Jack, lift him on a stand and fire a volley. The flag falls and Kruger has been transformed into Britannia.

This elaborate little film illustrates a number of characteristics common to many of the anti-Boer propaganda films. First is the physical obliteration, transformation and ultimate transcendence of the enemy. Just as the early cinema audience marvelled to see the physical preservation of real objects, so too it was fascinated with the cinema's seemingly magical ability to make images, particularly of villains, disappear. A second characteristic of these films is the all-encompassing, mystical power of the Union Jack, symbol of the all-powerful British Empire.

Another film in which Kruger is purely physically rather than cinematically obliterated is Paul's *Snowballing Oom Paul*, described in the R. W. Paul Catalogue of 1900. Here some school children have made a snowman effigy of Kruger. They then vie with each other to knock its block off. Eventually, the snow effigy is completely trampled under foot. Similarly, in a Warwick film (5880b) called *Guy Fawkes Day Incident*, a group of men and boys stab at an effigy of Kruger before igniting it and watching it consumed by the flames.

In a Hepworth Company film, *The Conjuror and the Boer*, described as a new patriotic trick film, a 'typical Boer' much to his disgust is enveloped in a large Union

Jack.⁸ He is thus transformed into a figure of Britannia who hangs up the flag on her trident and waves it back and forth. The camera then closes in on the flag so that it fills the entire screen, looming larger than life. The words 'Rule Britannia' appear in large letters at the bottom of the picture. Just as the Union Jack is hallowed so are other flags reviled. In a Hepworth animated cartoon, *Wiping Something off the Slate*, a Boer flag is seen waving over a slate on which the word 'Majuba' is written. A British soldier tears down the flag, tramples it in disgust, and drenches it in water so that he can wipe the objectionable word from the slate.

These propaganda films seem crude and primitive, especially when compared with the sophistication and visual power of latter-day propaganda films, particularly those of the Nazis. Lacking in a developed visual language, the early propagandist had to content himself with camera trickery and with the power of the dramatisation as in a morality play. However, the cinema was in its infancy, and the films aptly corresponded to the lack of sophistication in the viewing audience. Boer War films do exhibit the dual preoccupations of the cinema at its birth, the realism of Lumière and the magic of Méliès. There is both the obsession with recording true events, albeit from a certain perspective, and the desire to make the cinema perform feats, through editing and double exposure, to dramatise the 'cause'.

Even though the Boer War ultimately troubled many a conscience and generally shook imperial confidence, the cinema only served to gloss over that which was disturbing, perpetuating the myths of Empire and satisfying the emotional needs of a populace at war. And the myths of Boer War cinematography aptly conform to the function of all myths, which in the view of Lévi-Strauss are adopted to make coherent that which is basically self-contradictory. ■

⁸ Description in *Hepworth Films for the Cinematograph* (London, Hepworth & Co., 1903).

War balloon and army transport crossing the Vaal River



⁷ The film has not survived but an extremely detailed description can be found in the R. W. Paul Catalogue of 1900.



THE YORKSHIRE PIONEERS

Allan T. Sutherland

It has become so commonplace to look at film production as an activity organised on a national, if not indeed an international scale, that the idea of regional production companies may seem almost a contradiction in terms. But in the early years of this century a great deal of British film production was carried out by such companies, which ranged from minute one-man enterprises serving a handful of local exhibitors to firms such as the Sheffield Photo Company, whose films were exported all over the world. This examination of early production in Yorkshire is thus by no means of purely local interest, but reflects upon the pattern of film-making in Britain up to the early years of the 1914-18 war.



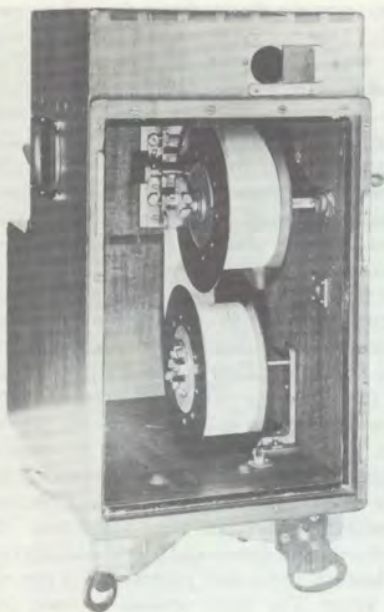
This is not to say that Yorkshire can be treated as a simple microcosm of the country as a whole. Undoubtedly the area has an unusually rich cinematic history, as a current research fellowship sponsored by the Yorkshire Arts Association continues to demonstrate. And this history spans a much longer period even than that of the Brighton group of film-makers (James Williamson, G. A. Smith, etc.). The combination of two important production companies (Bamforth's of Holmfirth and the Sheffield Photo Company) with local exhibitors as independent and forceful as Henry Hibbert and Sydney Carter enabled the area to retain its distinct regional identity until well after other independent producers had either been absorbed by one of the London-based companies or abandoned production altogether (by far the more frequent end).

But to begin at the beginning we must look further back, over a decade before either of the companies mentioned above was founded, to the work of a largely neglected pioneer, L. A. A. Le Prince. At a date when many authorities do not admit the motion picture to have been invented at all, Le Prince took a series of films in and around Leeds, using a camera of his own design which incorporated a film strip with sprocket holes (at first with a paper and later a celluloid base) and intermittent motion. He projected these films on a screen using a projector with electric arc illumination and a Maltese Cross intermittent movement.

Le Prince, a Frenchman who spent much of his life in England, was born in August 1842. Daguerre, who was a close friend of Le Prince's father, gave him lessons in photography. After postgraduate study of chemistry and physics at the University of Leipzig, he started working as a photographer and also took up painting and ceramics. In 1866 he moved to Leeds, where he joined the firm of Whitley Partners, brassfounders, as a designer. He married in 1869; with his wife he opened a school of applied art in Park Square, Leeds. Here he carried out colour photography on metal and pottery, fixing the colours in a special kiln. He established a reputation as a photographer, executing commissions for Queen Victoria and W. E. Gladstone among others.

It seems likely that Le Prince became attracted to the idea of attempting to produce motion pictures after seeing Eadweard Muybridge's series of photographs taken with a battery of up to twenty-four cameras, which were published in 1875. A man of Le Prince's background would have been well acquainted with the many forms of optical entertainment (panoramas, dioramas, etc.) that had been popular since the eighteenth century. He was probably equally familiar with the optical toys, such as the Zoetrope and the Praxinoscope, which, using the principle of persistence of vision, brought at least one form of moving picture into people's homes. And he certainly both knew and used the optical ('magic') lantern which, used with various forms of mechanical slide, familiarised the Victorian public with projected two-

'Weary Willie', a Bamforth production of 1898. Stills made from the frame by the National Film Archive



Le Prince's single-lens camera-projector. Lent to Science Museum, London by Miss G. Marie Le Prince

dimensional movement. (As Kevin Brownlow has pointed out in *The Parade's Gone By*, the uproar created by the Lumière film of a train entering a station was due not to the fact that it was moving, but that it was moving *towards the audience*: 'Lumière selected this head-on view in order to get the whole train into the picture; a side angle would have been inadequate. By doing this, he unconsciously added the one element missing from other attempts at simulating movement: dynamism.') For Le Prince, as for other pioneers of cinema, the nature of the problem was clear: how to combine the by now familiar concept of projected movement with the rapidly developing science of photography?

In 1881 Le Prince moved to New York, where he lived until May 1887, when he returned to Leeds. During this period he was permitted to use the facilities of the workshop at the American Institute for the Deaf, where his wife was teaching art. He was at this time faced with difficulties in exposing his pictures in fast enough succession, experimenting with multiple lenses, used in series. In November 1886 he applied for an American patent for a camera having from one to sixteen lenses.* (Much confusion has been caused by the fact that when the Patent Office issued the patent they cut out the reference to the one- and two-lens versions, claiming an earlier patent was an infringement; it should be made quite clear that there is no evidence that Le Prince was, as has been suggested with monotonous frequency, treating a sixteen-lens camera as his main line of investigation. Such a camera was given prominence in his patents for the excellent reason that it was the most complex of a number of possible versions he had not yet totally ruled out: if that one worked, then so would all the others.) The only evidence I have been able to trace as to whether Le Prince had constructed a camera or projector ('receiver' or 'deliverer', to use his own terms) prior to his patent application is a statement by his daughter Marie, whose source I have not

been able to locate, but which I reproduce in the fullest version known to me:

'I remember my father when I was a very small child always talking and thinking about this idea. He had little money and his family was large, so it was difficult for him to do anything about it then, but when he went to New York in 1881 he found some facilities for his work. That would be in the early 80s; my mother taught at a deaf and dumb school and he had a little room there fitted up for his experiments. One day, when I was about fourteen, I wanted to call him to tea and I pushed open the door of the little room, and there, on the white-washed wall, I saw some forms which moved. I did not know what they were and my father shut the door quickly, but I suppose I was the first child ever to see a moving film picture.'

Marie was born in 1871, so if this account is correct Le Prince succeeded in projecting a motion picture in 1885—a decade before the Lumières' famous demonstration at the Grand Café.

Soon after his return to England, Le Prince did make a sixteen-lens camera/projector—which is now on display in the Science Museum, London—for use as 'proof of working' when he was applying for European patents. This camera took two bands of film, mounted side by side; the eight shutters facing one film were released in quick succession, after which the remaining eight were discharged while the first film was being moved on ready for another set of pictures.

In January 1888 Le Prince applied for a British patent, granted the following November, which was almost identical in specifications to the American patent of 1886, but did not exclude the one-lens version. The significant feature of this camera was the use of a continuous length of pliable film, drawn intermittently between two revolving drums, which was clamped firm during exposure. It is evident that Le Prince had not as yet found a material he regarded as totally satisfactory



'The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle' (Bamforth, 1899)



Pictures taken by Le Prince in Joseph Whitley's garden, 1888. Photo: Science Museum, London

as a supporting base for the film emulsion.

In 1888 Le Prince built two single-lens cameras and a projector. With these he took a number of series of pictures, some of which are still extant, at least in part. In October 1888 he took a series of pictures, at about 12 per second, using the second one-lens camera. At around the same time, he took another series, at around 20 per second, of traffic on Leeds Bridge. According to Frederic Mason, a woodworker who assisted in building these pieces of equipment, Le Prince found the construction of the projector much more difficult than the camera: it evolved through several stages. Eventually he arrived at a model having a single lens and electric arc illumination in place of the limelight he had used earlier. When, in the autumn of 1889, he obtained some rolls of celluloid film, one of his last difficulties—that of finding a suitable supporting base for his photographic emulsion—was solved.

Le Prince visited his brother in Dijon in September 1890. He caught the train back to Paris on September 16th, but did not arrive at his destination. Neither he nor his baggage was ever seen again. After this mysterious disappearance, Le Prince was eventually presumed dead, and most of the contents of his workshop were put up for sale. Thus, ironically, though Le Prince had developed a camera and projector containing all the features that were to become standard in later years (and which were indeed considerably more sophisticated than many of the early machines that were marketed commercially) he had, so far as one can tell, no influence at all on later researchers; all his discoveries had to be made afresh.

Le Prince's lack of influence was of little matter, since the invention of the cinematograph was by this point a matter of historical inevitability. When the Lumières gave their

* American Patent No. 376,247: 'Method of, and Apparatus for, Producing Animated Pictures'.



Top: 'Winky's Ruse'. Bioscope advertisements of May 1914 (Winky) and March 1915 (Baby Langley)

show at the Grand Café in 1895, it became public property. Lantern operators and fairground showmen quickly recognised the potential for entertainment, and an immediate demand for cinematograph machines, or any working substitute, was created. Among the members of the Lumières' audience to foresee the possibility of commercial exploitation was William Riley, of the Bradford firm of Riley Brothers, lantern slide and equipment manufacturers. With solid Yorkshire pragmatism, Riley returned to Bradford and gave a description of the Lumières' machine to Cecil Wray, a local manufacturing optician, commissioning him to manufacture one. Or so the story goes; I personally have reservations about this version of affairs, in view of the fact that Wray was evidently already experimenting with cinematography, having filed a patent specification the previous January for a device to project the pictures of the kineoscope (which Edison had neglected to patent in Europe) on to a screen. In August 1896 he submitted a patent application for a more complex device designed to be fitted to any optical lantern.* This was marketed by Riley's as the 'Kineoptoscope'.

Whether or not it was manufactured by Wray, Riley's did possess a camera by about 1899, and in co-operation with Bamforth and Co. of Holmfirth, a prominent firm of lantern slide and picture postcard manufacturers, started producing 'RAB' films. Bamforth's, founded in 1870 by James Bamforth, pioneered the use of life models in lantern slides, a practice later adopted by other manufacturers, including Riley's. By the 1890s Bamforth's was

* Patents No. 182, 1895: 'Improvements in or relating to the Kinetoscope' and No. 19,181, 1896: 'Improvements in apparatus for Exhibiting Kineoptoscope or Zoetrope Pictures'.



advertising itself, very probably correctly, as 'The Largest Producer of Life Model Slides in the World.'

The partnership between the two firms was an obvious one. Riley's possessed a camera, thrusting business acumen and a wide distribution network: in October 1895 they had, beside their thriving British and European business, eight branches in the U.S.A. Bamforth's had, for their lantern slide work, assembled a full studio set-up, including costume, props and scenery departments.

'The premises in which the business is conducted are curious in the extreme, consisting as they do of a series of successive studios and workshops perched at various points on a precipitous slope between the house, which overlooks the valley and the village of Holmfirth, and the first studio, which is well down towards the valley. This slope, almost impossible of cultivation as a field, has been banked, terraced and dotted with flights of steps, fountains, shady walks, leafy dells and pleasant summer-houses in a variety that might be thought impossible in such a space... The life-model studio is a room of 31 ft. by 18 ft. with a scene-dock and a property room at each end; and with roof-light and side-light at both sides...'

Such extensive facilities were then unknown to film-makers; most of them were working on open-air stages such as that erected by Cecil Hepworth in 1898-99: 'It consisted of a wooden floor, about 10 ft. by 6 ft., laid down in the tiny back garden with two or three uprights to prop the flats against. The scenery was painted in the kitchen.' And they certainly did not enjoy the degree of co-operation that James Bamforth obtained by virtue of his firm's position in a town the size of Holmfirth. 'Policemen can always be borrowed, in their own uniforms "by arrangement", but real soldiers and firemen are not so easily obtainable in Holmfirth... Fortunately the railway officials are always willing (subject to the calls of duty) to place a train in any position...' (*The Photogram*, Feb. 1899).

Whether these facilities were greatly used in the early films seems doubtful. Riley and Bamforth's first film was *A Snowball Encounter*, a short (probably around 50

feet) comedy about boys throwing snowballs. This seems typical of what followed; the Hepworth 1903 catalogue lists fifteen RAB films of which eleven are comedies, the rest being actualities or scenic films, none longer than about 75 feet. The 'schoolboy escapades' type of comedy was evidently a favourite, perhaps because of the saving on wages: the 1903 catalogue lists four such: *Boys Sliding*, *Pillow Fight*, *The Schoolmaster's Portrait* and *Leap Frog*, in which 'the numerous collapses cause great amusement'. The lack of dramatic subjects indicates that Bamforth's regarded their film-making as distinct from, and secondary to, their lantern slide and postcard work. This impression is supported by the fact that no attempt was made to produce filmed equivalents of their slide-sets, though they were often turned into postcards. Bamforth's did in fact abandon film production in about 1903, and concentrated on lantern slides and postcards for the next ten years. The exact reasons are not clear, but I suspect that Bamforth's simply decided that to keep pace with the (by then) increasing length and complexity of other companies' films would conflict with the lantern slide work which was still their main business.

This attitude contrasts strongly with that of Frank Mottershaw of the Sheffield Photo Co. and his sons, for whom film production was from an early date a much more serious commitment. SPC was started in 1882 as a photographic business. Mottershaw began to give 'cinematograph entertainments' in about 1900, and soon ventured into production:

'Cinematograph pictures were causing quite a sensation about this time, so the two eldest sons devoted much of their time in this direction. They built a Cine Camera from old camera parts and the first moving picture was quite a success. From this stage a new Cine Camera and Projector were purchased and in a very short time the firm had launched an all out effort to take moving pictures of football matches and topical events, which were developed and shown on the screen the same evening.'

Topicals remained a major element of SPC's business. But since these were usually made for 'same evening' showing, by prior arrangement with individual cinemas, and hence not advertised, records of them are scarce. One of the most significant early topicals was taken when Edward VII visited Sheffield in 1904; Mottershaw used a number of operators, positioned at vantage points, and the films were shown at two Sheffield halls that night. (This incident indicates the value of Mottershaw's experience in still photography: in 1895 he had used his entire staff of photographers to take pictures of Queen Victoria visiting Sheffield.) Their work in this field was by no means confined to the immediate locality. The *Bioscope* of September 18th 1908 reported that SPC had filmed the St. Leger at Doncaster (as no doubt they did every year) and despatched copies to reach Nottingham and Doncaster by 8.30 and catch the 7.20 train to London.

† Personal communication to Robert Benfield by Frank Mottershaw's daughter, Edith Marion Spring.

In 1902 F. S. Mottershaw, Frank Mottershaw's eldest son, spent a year in London working with R. W. Paul to gain experience. On his return to Sheffield new premises were opened, with an open-air stage and rooms equipped for printing and developing cinematograph film. Apart from the topicals, SPC then started to produce films in almost all the genres current at the time: comedies (*Mixed Babies*, *Tramps and Washerwomen*), dramas (*Lost in the Snow*), scenics (*A Ride on the Kinner Light Railway*), reversing films (*An Eccentric Burglary*) and even the more unusual genres such as the faked topical (*Russo-Japanese War—Attack on a Japanese Convoy*). In particular, SPC won a reputation for its chase films, a genre it pioneered with *A Daring Daylight Robbery* (early 1903), described in 1929 by F. S. Mottershaw:

'I used the back of a hotel in a valley in Derbyshire as a mansion, and showed a burglar trying to break in . . . The burglar was interrupted by a policeman, there was an exciting struggle on the roof, and the policeman was flung to the ground—we stopped the camera and substituted a dummy. Then followed a chase from the mansion by a second policeman—over walls, through a little river, through fields and hedges. Finally there was the capture, an unexpected bit of realism! A real country policeman, then coming off his beat, saw the finish of the chase down a hillside and hurried to the aid of his supposed colleague. . . . Down he came, full of fight and purpose, and joined in the affair in deadly earnest!'

Mottershaw stated that the film was shot in three days at a cost of £25, and that between 500 and 600 copies were sold, including an American order for 100 copies.

This film, a copy of which has recently been located in the U.S.A., was the first of several such, with which SPC established an international reputation. They followed it later in the year with *Robbery of the Mail Coach*, a vigorous costume drama. But their most notable work was *The Life of Charles Peace* (1905), which told the story of the notorious local murderer. This film, 870 feet long, was probably the longest work the British cinema had yet produced—slightly over twice the length of *Rescued by Rover*, made at approximately the same time—though it seems from the catalogue synopsis to have lacked the latter's sophistication of narrative technique. From this point SPC's work gradually tailed off, and they ceased to make films for general sale in about 1911. Although their later films tended to be increasingly less enterprising (they included, for example, a remake of *Daring Daylight Robbery: A Daylight Burglary*) they did include a single sound-on-disc film, *They Can't Diddle Me*.

At about this time, two prominent local exhibitors each made an attempt to start producing films. In 1912 Sydney Carter of New Century Pictures set up the Robin Hood Film Company, which spent a twelve-week season filming at Ravenscar, near Scarborough. There were frequent hold-ups, and it is doubtful whether any films

were completed. After a fire in October 1912 destroyed all their film stock (it is not clear whether this included exposed footage), the company wound up.

The Captain Kettle Film Company had slightly better fortune. It was set up in 1913 by Henry Hibbert of Hibbert's Pictures and the novelist Cutcliffe Hyne, using as a studio Towers Hall, Bradford, a former roller-skating rink which Hibbert had acquired in 1911 for use as a cinema. Little came of the original plan for filming Hyne's *Captain Kettle* stories, but the firm did turn out some thirty assorted productions over the last half of 1914.

It was also in 1914 that Bamforth's took up production again—this time with somewhat more determination. They acquired themselves a comic, Winky (Reginald Switz), 'A joyously funny personage who should rapidly make for himself a prominent place amongst the various well known humorous figures of the screen,' said a *Bioscope* review of May 1914. 'Winky is thoroughly and essentially British, and so is the class of humour which he dispenses.'

Over the next year Bamforth released a number of short (400–800 ft.) comedies. The Winky series accounted for many of these; *Bioscope* reviews for the period describe some fifty (clearly by no means a complete list) of which the following are typical. *Winky's Weekend*: 'Left at home, he tries a new mode of chimney-cleaning, utilising old Grimbo's hens for the purpose. When Mrs. Winky returns it costs her a goodly sum before her hubby is allowed to come to breakfast.' (*Bioscope*, 27 August, 1914). *Winky Causes a Smallpox Panic*: 'In the course of a scheme to acquire a free lunch, the comic and his "doctor" pal find themselves bundled into the van and are subsequently subjected to a singularly unpleasant mode of disinfection.' (*Bioscope*, 20 May, 1914).

Bamforth also possessed a cartoonist, Mr. D. Tempest, and in 1915 they acquired a comedienne, Lily Ward, a child star, Baby Langley, and another comic, Alf Scottie. At the same time the flow of Winky comedies suddenly dried up. No statement was made in the trade press of the time, but

after *Winky, the Long and the Short of it*, released in April 1915, no more was heard until *Mushroom Stew*, the last Winky film that I am aware of, was released in December 1915. The key to this may lie in a letter sent to the *Bioscope* in December 1914 by the Managing Director of the Yorkshire Cine Co., who were distributing Bamforth films, in which he states: "'Winky", the star comedian of Bamforth films, is an Englishman and the son of an Englishman.' It is quite possible that Reginald Switz might have been quietly dropped by Bamforth because of unfounded rumours about his nationality, particularly as his disappearance coincided with a sudden outburst of a somewhat unpleasant variety of nationalism in YCC advertising ('Do you realise that the heads of many of the American firms selling films here were born in Germany? Masticate these facts, and decide to support British . . .')

Lily Ward left Bamforth in August 1915 to join Pyramid Films, a firm which had taken over the Towers Hall studio from Captain Kettle. Pyramid already had one comedian, 'Captain Jolly'; they issued a few short comedies, but their only sizeable release was a four-reel romance, *My Yorkshire Lass*. Bamforth films were themselves absorbed by a new firm, the Holmfirth Producing Company, which shortly afterwards leased a studio in London. Holmfirth produced half a dozen dramas of reasonable length before vanishing into obscurity.

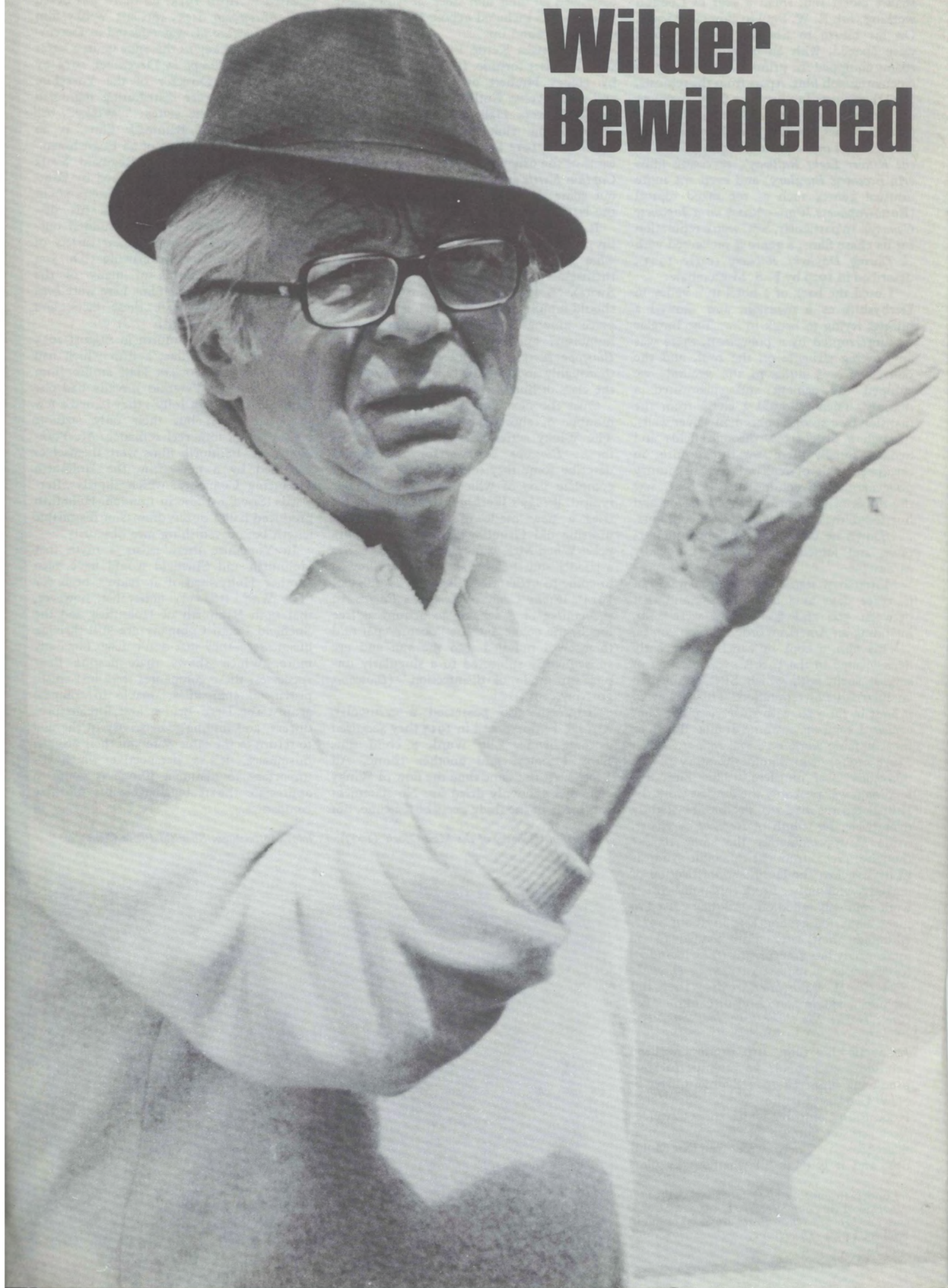
In Yorkshire there exists a myth that Holmfirth and Sheffield would have been another Hollywood if it hadn't been for 'The War'. It's very noticeable, however, that both Bamforth of Holmfirth and the Sheffield Photo Company are still thriving businesses—they just don't make films any more. Which shows that, despite their successes, these companies were just small, provincial companies, unable to compete against the large British and foreign producers, and finding it necessary in the end to return to the safer waters of their original businesses. It's a perspective which it's important to maintain if one is going to appreciate the real achievements of these companies.

The cast of 'Robbery of the Mail Coach' (1903). © John Mottershaw, Sheffield Photo Company



* London *Evening News*, October 1st, 1929. Full synopses of this film, *Robbery of the Mail Coach* and *The Life of Charles Peace* are to be found in Rachael Low's *The History of the British Film*, Vol. I.

Wilder Bewildered



If at first you succeed, try, try, try again. This might be the motto of Universal Studios, the most successful in Hollywood today. Here the sets are up for *Airport 77*: a listing jet, exactly life size, windows carefully shattered and drinks meticulously spilt for yet another disaster (in the Bermuda Triangle, it would seem). There, for the obligatory *Jaws II*, sharks are rolling off the assembly line, bland as automobiles. In the midst of this reproductive frenzy, Billy Wilder and his habitual collaborator, I. A. L. Diamond, are busy in their own way, preparing the final script of *Fedora*, a show business drama based on one of the stories in Tom Tryon's best-selling collection *Crowned Heads*. It was in his little bungalow of an office, and beneath six gleaming Oscars, that Wilder spoke of past 'failures' and present hopes.

'I'd like you to know that my output of the last few years isn't pleasant to talk about because it did not make too much of a splash. It wound up on the red side of the accounting. With *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, I was prematurely reviving interest in Holmes. Now the market is swamped with smarter brothers and seven-and-a-half per cent solutions. I often make my pictures prematurely and sometimes I make them post-mortally. But generally when you talk about past films what comes out is: good, bad or indifferent, I'm glad I made it. Actually, I'm saddened I made it, why should I be glad, I surely didn't want it to flop. Any time a picture crashes, it's like someone designing a new plane that doesn't fly, and there are passengers on it—actors, technicians, electricians—and it eats up a great deal of time which, as life goes on, becomes more scarce.

'In fact, with *Sherlock Holmes* we had originally a much longer, more elaborate picture, which did not seem to work in our previews. So, panic-stricken, we started slashing around. In retrospect, I think we should have stuck to what we had. It would have been a far better picture if the two or two-and-a-half episodes which were omitted had been left in. A composer can't just cut out certain movements of his concerto. The ones that precede it or come after it are going to suffer. It's arranged for a certain length, a certain development, a certain span of time.

'*Avanti!* was too mild, too mellow, too gentle. You go to a comedy now as you would go to a bordello, you expect a certain raciness, and then you find yourself visiting your maiden aunt. It's very tame, they serve tea, everybody's dressed, nobody swears, nobody smokes marijuana. But I couldn't do out and out frontal nakedness. We've got rid of the shackles of censorship, but I find I still create a tacit censorship, which makes it more of a challenge, more elegant. Mr. Lubitsch's pictures were far more erotic, he could do far more with the green door itself than anything that goes on behind it.

'Critics ask me why I wanted to make this or that picture, why I wanted to make *Avanti!* I've no idea. But it's like the man says: Why did I marry that woman? Why did I go to Las Vegas? Why did I blow twenty thousand dollars? I don't know why. But I can't undo it. You write a lousy play. It doesn't work. You change it. You try it out in Boston. Then you take that son of a bitch and you bury it and it's forgotten. But pictures go on and on, they go on television, they get written about by critics over and over again. You're writing this piece for a magazine, and it's going to be published two, three, six weeks hence, maybe more. But a picture takes a year-and-a-half or two years. So you find yourself composing what you

thought would be a beautiful polka, but people are not dancing the polka any more, they aren't even dancing the twist any more! So you're playing on the bandstand and the dance floor is empty. You've lost time, you've lost self-esteem, courage, confidence in your judgment, and the front office has lost confidence in you. They say: Well, Wilder, he hasn't got it any more, he's old-fashioned, he's on the wrong track. To them the right track is *Airport 1999*! I've never tried to repeat a success of mine. But sequels are very fashionable today. The picture I'm preparing now, *Fedora*, well, I was seriously thinking, to make it sound more fashionable, of calling it *Fedora II*.

'I was talking the other day to some students at UCLA. I said: You are now studying pictures, you want to work in pictures. Let me give you some sober advice. If I had a son or daughter, I'd advise them to go into the only two branches where they are guaranteed a livelihood: become a stunt man or go into special effects. Audiences would just like to have harsher and harsher stuff. They've been spoiled rotten by sit-coms on television. Or by the certainty—it's mathematically calculated—that, every three-and-a-half minutes, something will explode! The thirtieth floor is going to burst into flames, stunt men are going to fly out of the window on fire, a boat is going to turn turtle. . . I think that there were more sparks flying, more heat given off in one dialogue scene of *All About Eve* than in that whole goddam skyscraper! But who will listen to it today? Is anyone going to wake up his neighbour and say: Hey, listen, you just missed something bright that was said?

'You might say that *Ace in the Hole* was a premature disaster movie, where I tried to concentrate all the horror on just one man. But today it's like a circus sideshow, there's the bearded lady, the man with nine legs, or whatever. Just sensations driving long, sharp spikes into the audience and, in between, they go out to buy popcorn or sit there like village idiots. I couldn't do that because I don't believe in it. The great success of Mr. De Mille, and nobody could imitate him, was that he took that gilded crap and he handled it as if it was the Holy Grail. And the audience knew damn well this guy was serious, he believed in his material, and so they did too.

'Many critics pooh-pooh the well-made picture. They think it's like the well-made play, artificial, *déjà vu*, people aren't wearing such well-cut suits any more. So you do it without nuance, no dissolves, no fade-ins. And no third act. Let the audience write its own third act, its own story. But it's extremely difficult to plot well, the way we learned it. It's much easier to be let loose on that very potent and dangerous thing, the camera. Which is fine, but if you don't learn your

craft first, you are like a surgeon who hasn't served his internship and already performs operations. The critic who sees a well-plotted thing will say: a good plumber, but not quite. . . not quite an artist! Here in Hollywood, don't forget, we're in an industry, so many people depend on us. We're making cars. We don't have to make lousy cars, but why should we be ashamed of making a Cadillac or a Mercedes?

'Nowadays, we're making very few pictures, but the overflow has gone, thank God. There's no more unemployment, it all goes into television, as you know. It's become a great gamble, and only phenomena like sharks and exorcists keep the gamblers at the crap table. You hope to make one of the five pictures everyone is going to see all over the world. In the old days, sure, there were problems with the studios, with censorship, but, you know, I was younger then, my output was better, my health was better, my love life was better. When you're young, and especially when your luck is in, you just think: I can never fail, I can go on for ever. Then, suddenly, you become aware that all this time you've been walking a tightrope over an abyss. Can I make it to the other side? Will they take the cameras away from me? Well, the front office hasn't lost confidence in me yet, they're letting me make this picture. But it's my own confidence I don't know about, my own ego. It's the impotence complex. Can I make it?

'*Fedora* will be my first serious picture since *Witness for the Prosecution*. I didn't plan it that way. I never say the next will be a comedy, the next will be a drama. You don't go to bed with the blonde, the brunette, the blonde, the brunette. It's how stimulated you are by her behind, the way she wears her hair.

'It will also be my first picture on the subject of Hollywood since *Sunset Boulevard*, and I can say things I always wanted to say about the place. It deals with show business from the point of view of a totally obsessed, selfish star who works on her own legend because she wants to be remembered for ever. It's a big juicy hunk of a role that could be as interesting as Norma Desmond. Mr. Diamond and I had been working for a long time on another Hollywood story, and it all began to jell when we ran across Tryon's book. It should be quite poignant, with a great deal of *Stella Dallas* and *Magnificent Obsession* and all those classic soap-operas, but on a slightly higher level, I hope. The only problem is casting. I'm totally bewildered. All it needs is a 40-year-old Garbo and a 55-year-old Spencer Tracy. A cinch. It's possible to find an 18-year-old unknown and make a sensation of her, but where do you find a genius of forty? Where has she been all her life, and all yours?

'All I know is that, when I get up at five in the morning, I can't wait to get to the studio and start writing, so it must have something. I cool off very easily. Sometimes I cool off too late. I'll never make a badly shot picture or a badly constructed picture or a picture where the actors behave like idiots, but with the subject you only hope that what interested you will interest the audience. You've got to be lucky. Be lucky, be lucky, be lucky!

Gilbert Adair

Film Reviews

Die Marquise von O . . .

Small wonder that Ionesco once claimed Kleist as one of the few writers with whom he felt a genuine affinity in their shared concern with the absurdity of the human condition. On the face of it—a virtuous widow becomes pregnant and hasn't the least idea how it happened—nothing could be more absurd than the basic premise of Kleist's novella, *Die Marquise von O . . .*; and Eric Rohmer has exquisitely gentle fun with the sighings and posturings as the characters, logically attempting to probe the illogicality of the situation, desperately try to create the substance of a husband out of the shadowy lover.

Articulating his film through a melodic alternation of fades and direct cuts (respectively demarcating the moments of baffled impasse and the sudden rushes toward decision or supposed resolution), Rohmer exactly captures the breathless gravity of Kleist's style: a classical serenity stirred by a fierce undertow of agitation as the injured innocent suffers proudly, resignedly, and for all the absurdity of the situation, very movingly. Although Kleist kept his story at arm's length as a legend of another (not so very distant) time and place, a kind of reality keeps breaking through the surface ('He smashed the last of the murderous brutes, whose arms were wound about her slender figure, in the face with the hilt of his sword and made him reel back with the blood gushing from his mouth'). With Rohmer's *Die Marquise von O . . .* (Gala), however, a period tale of Italy told by a Frenchman through German mouths, the distanciation is complete; and the hieratic gestures of his characters, the suppressed concentration of their passions, the rigorous austerity of the interiors (each discreetly sporting its antique bust), mean that what we are watching is, in the purest sense, a classical tragedy.

Confined but by no means extinguished beneath this calm and orderly framework, one finds lurking all the contradictory attributes which make Kleist such a singularly modern writer, and which sometimes obscure the fact that he was, after all, a Romantic (*Die Marquise von O . . .* was published in 1808) whose works teem with the full panoply of dreams, miracles, horrid happenings and, naturally, romantic love. 'Perhaps you will give birth to a fantasy,' says the Marquise's mother jokingly when her daughter's condition is still merely a remote suspicion. 'The father will be Morpheus or one of his pageant of dreams,' echoes the Marquise (Edith Clever) delightedly. Immediately, though supposedly killed in battle, the Russian Count (Bruno Ganz) who secretly raped her reappears before them, merely reiterating 'I'm alive, yes, I'm alive' in response to their amazed questioning. And we are at once peering over the edge into the realm of the Flying Dutchman, Melmoth the Wanderer and Byron's Corsair.

It is certainly no accident that, in identifying the Marquise with a swan in his fevered dreams, the wounded Count should thereby evoke the amours of Jupiter and Leda. And one of Rohmer's most telling additions to Kleist's story is the sunburst of light behind the Count as he leaps to the Marquise's rescue out of the smoke and din of battle, a dazzling, godlike hero all in white, subsequently metamorphosed in the

Marquise's mind (and imaged in the altarpiece seen during the wedding ceremony) into Lucifer being cast out by the Lord. But it was of course Jupiter who took the form of a swan to seduce Leda; and the reversal of roles in *Die Marquise von O . . .*, implying that the Count was seduced into committing rape, is one of Kleist's series of subterranean digs at hypocritical attitudes to the natural impulses of sex (the 'incestuous' passion of the eventual reconciliation between the Marquise and her father is another).

Rohmer, however, extends the attack even further by another brilliant addition to (or rather reworking of) Kleist's story. In the novella, during his stay with the Marquise's family, the Count is asked for an account of his miraculous escape from death, and tells them 'a number of things that were interesting for what they revealed about his passion for the Marquise.' There follows the description of the swan identified with the Marquise, which he had once spattered with mud as a child only to see it dive and rise up clean once again, and to which in his delirium he had called but 'had not been able to make her come to him, for all her pleasure lay in gliding up and down and haughtily puffing out her breast.' Transposed to the end of the film, addressed to the Marquise *alone* and *after*

her rejection of his love in a marriage of convenience, the story looms less as a confession of hopeless passion than as a direct accusation.

In the context of today, it is tempting to read a feminist bias into the way the Marquise, after wilting tearfully as a hard-pressed and helpless heroine, suddenly discovers not only the strength of character to direct her own life by advertising for the father of her imminent child, but also a kind of serenity in this assumption of responsibility. Tempting yet dangerous, for as the Count implies, she is not only haughtily puffing out her breast in proud affirmation of her purity, but she is acting in strict accordance with the social rules which deny her that purity. Caught in the toils of absurdly rigid social conventions, none of the characters—and this is one of the joys of the film, aligning it with the teasing ethical problematics of Rohmer's earlier *contes moraux*—can quite be said to be innocent or guilty, since they each qualify their respective guilt or innocence by contradictory impulses (the Marquise's pride, the mother's righteous deceit, the father's sublimated incest, the Count's selfless devotion).

The real villain of the piece—reminding one that Kleist's subscription to the Romantic view of love as a kind of fatality, whether doomed or miraculously free, went oddly hand-in-hand with a revolutionary fervour inherited from the *Sturm und Drang* movement—is society itself. A fact that Rohmer neatly underlines by yet another addition to the original: the close-up of the young manservant Leopoldo staring at the distressed Marquise in the cellar after her rescue. Corresponding directly to the subsequent close-up of the Count as he similarly feasts his eyes (both men stand by the stairs, Leopoldo with a candle behind him, the Count holding up a lantern), this shot differs only in that when the Count stares at the Marquise she is no longer fully dressed and attended by a serving-woman, but sensuously stretched out in a satin nightgown, writhing in the evident clutches of an erotic dream.

'Die Marquise von O . . .': Edith Clever



Thereafter, the taunting probability hangs over this world in which love can triumph over all that, given similarly provocative circumstances, Leopoldo would have done precisely what the Count did. And accompanying it, the steadily increasing, equally taunting assurance (sealed by the scene in the carriage where the Marquise and her mother, facing Leopoldo's not quite impervious back, shrilly share their relief that they will at least be spared the ignominy of a servant as the husband-to-be) that had he done so, lacking the Count's personal, social and financial graces, he would never have found the same forgiveness.

TOM MILNE

Face to Face

In confronting Ingmar Bergman's *Face to Face* (CIC), the first impression has to be one of familiarity. As the title implies, and as can be expected from Bergman's increasing television work, it's an encounter that roams from one close-up to another; where *Cries and Whispers* would pause for frequent formal perspectives and groupings, *Face to Face* avoids theatrical distance in favour of piercing proximity to such an extent that the exact geography of the settings is often difficult to determine. It's a film, you might say, of placeless faces—except that we can place some of them only too well.

So well, indeed, do we know Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson that a mere change of dubbed voice and screen name (to Isaksson and Jacobi, and we've heard *those* before) can't relieve them of the weight of a catalogue of recollections. Not so long ago we shared ten years of their stormy married life, with its punch-ups, divorce, and tranquil reunion; the only surprise in seeing them together again is that they appear, after all, to be back at the starting-gate. Here too is Gunnar Björnstrand, with pained eyes and guillotine mouth, gazing on death as always with a fearful distaste. Inherited from *Cries and Whispers* is Kari Sylwan, baring the same lavish breast; and from the punctuating audience of *Magic Flute* comes the smiling red-headed girl, smiling still. The intervention of Birger Malmsten as the heavy—sheer evil, like something from Victorian melodrama—is so true to form one is tempted to hiss.

And the themes of *Face to Face* have equally recognisable features. Dr. Jenny Isaksson, psychiatrist, is not the first Bergman woman to commit suicide in front of us; thirty years ago, in *Night is My Future*, drops of blood fell like drumbeats from slashed wrists. Nor is she the first to undergo an identity crisis, the subject of *Persona* among many. Suicide and rebirth, a marriage collapsing from inertia, the generation gap, the mournful serenities of old age, the possible advantages of love—Bergman shuffles the well-worn cards and lays them out once more. The images and symbols, the cries and the whispers, follow the same ritual: the woman in black, the needling wife-hater, the hospital bed, the unheralded dream sequence, the melody from Mozart, earth, air, fire, water. If the film is less controlled than *Cries and Whispers*, one could also argue that it is less artificial, that Bergman has allowed himself to be caught off-guard in the choice of events, that this time the cards are following their own game.

While *Face to Face* repeats the experiences of *Hour of the Wolf* and *A Passion* in showing the abrupt chasms that open beneath a seemingly placid surface, its characters are no longer being used to explore the artist's function in society. The only art that concerns Bergman now, it seems, is that of survival, which means leaving society to its own unpleasant devices for a while and concentrating on oneself. So Jenny is a specialist in psychiatric disorders, well qualified to come face to face with her own predicament. It's neatly symbolised by the rooms, empty but for a telephone, of the house she and her husband



'Face to Face': Erland Josephson, Liv Ullmann

have just vacated. Their marriage isn't finished, although one can guess it might well be; they are simply moving house. Devoid of furniture, the rooms echo Jenny's present existence, as we and she come to realise. Like Borg and his son in *Wild Strawberries*, she is emotionally sterile, unable to give herself; like Borg, she undergoes a journey of dreams and memories to clarify the point. Staying with her grandparents until the new house is ready, she brushes away their instinct that something's wrong and settles for brittle small-talk. Visiting a mentally disturbed patient, she disregards the attempts to redefine basic meanings ('brow ... cheek ... eye ... mouth') and tells the woman not to put on an act. Gently courted by an admirer, Dr. Jacobi, she shares an amiable evening only to dismiss his discreet advances with brutal ridicule.

So far, so normal, bar one brief nightmare. Then, tricked into returning to her former home, she is raped and robbed, and the shell of her security is shattered. Staring at us in horizontal close-up, the usual position for Bergman's scenes of confession, she tells Jacobi what the experience was like, allows him to calm her hysteria, goes back to her grandparents' flat, and in due course swallows one handful of pills after another. Her fingers slide down a crack in the wallpaper too narrow to penetrate, and wandering through shades of blackness in red fairy-tale cap and gown Jenny drifts on the edge of death. Her body lies in what was once her nursery, and Bergman uses the motif of the medieval castle, a sunlit painting on the nursery blind, both to parenthesise her suicide and to 'explain' the fantasies that follow. The metaphor is valuable, representing not only her current isolation but also the image of herself which, as we gradually learn, was acquired in her childhood—that of an inviolate princess, sleeping troubled and alone in the whispering dark.

She wakes in hospital; it seems Jacobi got her there in time. And the film switches smoothly between the 'real' and the 'unreal' as Jenny slowly recovers. She struggles through clawing patients, one with hideous disfigurements beneath a bland mask, to find her grandfather hiding from death in a cupboard; she is visited by her husband, tries to cope ('wouldn't you like a chair?'), and has to ask him, harassed and dejected, to go away; she screams at her long-dead parents for their neglect and screams again when they sadly make their escape; she watches herself being nailed in a coffin and burned alive.

And at last, conscious once more, with Jacobi again a silent, sympathetic witness, she balances the first confession with a second, equally passionate psychotherapy session. She was 'surrounded by death as a child': her parents gone, she was disciplined through the strictness of her grandmother, much given to shutting her in the closet for punishment (the identification with Bergman's own much-quoted childhood is completed with this detail), and taught to control, never to trust. Curled foetally on the floor, while Jacobi, who is of course a gynaecologist, offers occasional guidance, Jenny prepares to start life again.

As a case-history, it isn't too unusual. Bergman rests nearly its entire weight on the performance by Liv Ullmann, who pulls all the stops out for what must have been exhausting scenes to play before a camera disinclined to blink, but remains a little too dry-eyed throughout. For those unable to work up much enthusiasm for Miss Ullmann, it's a long haul to the unremarkable explanation that she's like she is because of childhood traumas. But being face to face with Bergman is never comforting, nor wholly predictable, and the story of Jenny has nothing cosy in its conclusion. In a film of shocks, nothing is more chilling than Jacobi's revelation, at the end, that he's going abroad, unlikely to return. In a film of irony, nothing is more ironic than Jenny's meeting, once she has picked herself off the floor, with her own daughter. 'You never did like me,' says the girl, cheerfully, 'I know that. Don't worry, I can manage perfectly well by myself.' Parent and child are parted once more, nothing learned, nothing gained.

Back home, her grandparents continue their dignified decline, providing a similar model of clouded contentment to the parental image at the end of *Wild Strawberries*. They loathe and fear 'that mysterious and awful point when they will have to part,' as Jenny describes it for us in sudden voice-over, but they offer one consolation. 'For a brief moment I understood,' she says, 'that love embraces everything, even death.' After all the images of disquiet in *Face to Face*, it seems too hasty an epithet. Bergman's other language is more eloquent: the church bells, the ticking clocks, the uses of red, the ancient doll, the endless doors that will and will not open, the pictures on the nursery walls, the final, brooding image of a purple, stained-glass flower.

PHILIP STRICK

The Spider's Stratagem

It is disconcerting to come upon a film like *The Spider's Stratagem* for the first time six years late. It has been so widely discussed that there's bound to be a sense of *déjà vu*, as though one had seen the film already, no doubt in some Borgesian/Bertoluccian time-slip, rather than merely reading about it. In fact, of course, it has been fleetingly visible before in this country (though I missed it on those occasions); but it is thanks to Artificial Eye and the Academy that such a notable latecomer at long last reaches a commercial cinema.

1970, the year of both *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist*, still looks like a pinnacle of Bertolucci's career to date. He was still in his twenties, but he had gone through the Godardian overreaching of *Partner* and emerged securely on the other side. *The Spider's Stratagem* was financed by RAI (then at the height of its sponsorship of major features) on a scale which possibly protected Bertolucci against his own urges towards excess. With last year's *1900*, the full-blown international film-maker has arrived, casting Americans and Frenchmen as Emilians, projecting his peasant characters so that national idiosyncrasy might be picked up by audiences from Milwaukee to Morecambe, and flourishing the red flag on the full resources of Hollywood capital. By welcome contrast, *The Spider's Stratagem* takes its themes from a number of sources (Borges' story 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero', Bertolucci's concern with psychoanalytical journeys, the animal paintings by Ligabue which enrich the credits) but draws them into one Emilian context.

At the opening, the young Athos Magnani (Giulio Brogi) arrives by train at the evocatively named Tara, a town which seems far too distant in time to have earned anything so up-to-date as a railway station. A young sailor gets off the train with him; and later, when Magnani plans to leave, the sailor runs past him again towards the station. There's a feeling that a last chance has been missed; and when at the end Magnani returns to the station, the railway tracks as he waits and watches become overgrown, at first wispily, then truly buried beneath the weeds. The implication could be, as Richard Roud read it at the time, that 'no train will ever pass here again'. Or it could be a plain visual metaphor for the film's theme: the covering of tracks, the hallucination as well as the trap of time.

Athos, about whose profession or circumstances we are told nothing, has been summoned to Tara by a message from Draifa (Alida Valli), who was his father's mistress. Born in 1900, the same year as the protagonists of *1900*, the first Athos was an anti-Fascist of the 1930s, and was shot dead during a performance of *Rigoletto* at the local theatre; the year was 1936, the Fascists were blamed, but the mystery remains unsolved. Memories of the murdered Athos haunt the streets and piazzas and arcades, down which no car drives, where only old men walk and argue and seem to be waiting for the end of the story that was cut short thirty years before. But already Bertolucci has parted company with the Borges original: Borges' hero and traitor became a national symbol, whereas the first Athos Magnani is only a local mystery. The town, in which we see only old people and a couple of tantalising children, seems frozen in a much more remote past than 1936.

The imagery and memory of place dominate the film, particularly in the first half. The home of the immutable, dangerous Draifa is overgrown with ivy; Athos (or, rather, Athos in both past and present incarnations) moves along the lanes through the heavy green of the maize fields; the three men who were his father's fellow-conspirators meet in a derelict van abandoned by the river. Places, like the inn courtyard, take on different aspects by day and by night. And, repeatedly, the camera is set up so that there's a path leading straight away from us at the centre of the screen—paths of all kinds, from the flooded road under the autostrada, to the arcade down which Athos wheels his bicycle (two arguing faces, silhouetted in profile, separate to make way for him), to the arbour outside the window of the room where Draifa gives him a meal.

As the young Athos follows these paths into the past, he reaches a conclusion similar to that in Borges' story. Wildly, hopefully, childishly, the conspirators had planned to assassinate Mussolini during his visit to the Tara theatre. But the police were tipped off, the bomb was found, and the Duce never came. The traitor was also the local rebel hero, the first Athos; and after mysterious portents seemingly borrowed from *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, it was the traitor who died during *Rigoletto*, shot by his fellow plotters on a night when the whole town became an opera stage. Hasn't Bertolucci, however, gone a degree beyond Borges? In

'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero', the assassination plot devised to create the legend is the work of the man who discovers the treachery, with the repentant victim duly playing his assigned role. In the film, there's a strong suggestion that Athos plays the traitor as the first act of a total plot which *he* is stage-managing, to force his own martyrdom and so to provide the anti-Fascist cause with its necessary hero. (Otherwise, neither the betrayal nor his confession make sense; and there are other clues.)

Amid the layers of ambiguity, the son can only merge (literally at times, from one shot to the next) into the father. The tracks have been well covered: the stratagem involves everyone, including the man who will come along years later to unravel—or partly unravel—the plot, and who will keep his discoveries to himself. 'This too, perhaps, was foreseen,' as the Borges story ends. What Bertolucci further adds, and given the themes of his films this was also foreseeable, is the stress on the father-son relationship, the absorption of one personality into another and the desperate efforts to escape—in the son's defacing of his father's memorial, or in the flight through the trees, when Giulio Brogi seems to become both father and son, running blindly from some unknown hazard.

There are unresolved oddities in the film: the scene in which Athos junior is punched in the face by a stranger (apparently of his own generation, unlike almost everyone else we see), the possible parallel between the moment when he's locked in a dark stable and shines a light into the startled but amiable eye of a horse and his father's encounter with an escaped circus lion. Bertolucci moves towards surrealism when the lion's head, with fruit dribbling from its mouth, is served up at dinner. In this mystification there is exuberance; and a striking aspect of *The Spider's Stratagem* is the sense of pleasure it gives in the act of film-making—pleasure in surprise, in the tricks of landscape (like the moment when the screen of an outdoor cinema is rolled up, to reveal the country setting), in the grand cinematic *coup*, such as the return to the town at dusk, with *Rigoletto* thundering from the loudspeakers and the empty streets now occupied by an al fresco audience. Bertolucci has a gift for surrounding a claustrophobic theme with a sense of light and space; *The Spider's Stratagem* is a marvellously handsome film, both in settings and camerawork, and the balance between the clarity of the style and the (necessary) obfuscation of the subject is held as hardly before or since in his work.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

'The Spider's Stratagem': Giulio Brogi



Marathon Man

In the composite record of the 1972 Olympics, *Visions of Eight*, John Schlesinger directed a section on Britain's marathon runner, Ron Hill, which also made the only reference in the film to the kidnapping of the Israeli athletes and the subsequent massacre. It is tempting to read *Marathon Man* (CIC) as another version of that effectively brief document: the intersection of politics and one man's sporting obsession fed through the screen of William Goldman's spy-thriller novel. Unfortunately, in the screening process, the theme has been both unhelpfully generalised (Nazism and McCarthyism set up portentous but unexplored reverberations) and crudely fictionalised, with Goldman's erratically playful attitude towards his characters doing steadily less to distract attention from the congested banality of the plot.

The film in fact opens with newsreel from an earlier Olympics: the surprise marathon win at Tokyo by the bare-footed Ethiopian Abebe Bikila. The latter turns out to be the idol of 'Babe' Levy (Dustin Hoffman), a history student and would-be track star, with a chip on his shoulder for a father who was destroyed in

the McCarthy period, and a brother, 'Doc' (Roy Scheider), supposedly in the oil business but actually a lethal 'provider' in espionage. Doc's prime client is Christian Szell (Laurence Olivier, benignly outfitted to kill in spectacles and shaven hair-piece), an ex-Nazi hiding out in Uruguay and living on a fortune in diamonds, extracted from Jews in the concentration camps and now tended in a safe deposit box in New York by his brother. In return for his services as diamond courier, Doc receives information from Szell about other Nazis on the run. The intrigue thickens, or rather begins, when Szell's brother is killed in a road accident after a gratuitous duel with a fellow motorist.

This scene is put across in Goldman's original as an arbitrary act of God, arranged tongue-in-cheek by the author; the random crossing of two totally unconnected lives brought about by a fit of bad temper and the mind-loosening heat of Manhattan. In the film, the trickery has become more loaded: the accident takes place on the Day of Atonement, and is witnessed not just by casual pedestrians but by convenient groups of Jews. Elsewhere, the film even more blatantly pushes its cloak-and-dagger action into the centre-stage of contemporary and historical relevance. Doc is introduced driving through Paris, when his car becomes enmeshed in a platoon of demonstrators on bicycles, protesting against pollution; later, an attempt is made on his life while he stands on his hotel balcony watching a nationalist parade, and the bloody fracas is witnessed in mute horror by an old man on the balcony opposite. The nadir of self-conscious editorialising and pictorialising is reached in Doc's subsequent meeting with Szell who, forced out of Uruguay by his brother's death and the need to recover his diamonds, and determined to remove all those who might stand between himself and the gems, sets the agent up for assassination. The scene takes place at night in a wide-open plaza, the anonymous, futuristic architecture immediately conjuring the contemporary paranoia of films like *The Parallax View* (a comparison also hinted at in Michael Small's score). And as Szell moves in to thrust his spring-loaded cleaver into Doc's stomach, the hellish pink glow illuminating a fountain floods the screen.

While the story's political implications are pushed further than they are able to go, the film runs into even more trouble when it attempts to work the loosely assorted personal elements deeper into the pattern. In particular, Babe's eventual involvement in the plot seems an irrelevant intrusion, at least the way it is stage-managed through his affair with a girl, Elsa (Marthe Keller), who turns out to be in Szell's employ. Even before Szell has arrived in New York, and before Babe has made contact with his brother, he and Elsa are set upon by Szell's thugs in Central Park, in a mugging presumably designed as some kind of intimidation, but for exactly what purpose is never made clear. In a half-hearted gesture at the very beginning, the international intrigue is briefly paralleled with Babe's personal obsessions (here, as in the novel, it is uncertain how seriously we are supposed to take his academic and athletic ambitions). Immediately after the accident that kills Szell's brother, while Babe is jogging nearby round the reservoir in Central Park, he finds himself drawn into a similarly pointless competition with a fellow athlete. The parallel, however, remains undeveloped.

In one respect at least, Goldman and Schlesinger have extended the catchpenny devices of the novel by refusing to allow their hero to become a simple, brutalised avenger, taking satisfaction for his father's hounding to suicide and his brother's slaying by adopting a ruthless vigilante ethic in pursuing Szell. Here Babe retains a certain moral ambiguity, sentimental to a degree (he is conveniently not required to execute Elsa), but at least in keeping with the vague religious notions of absolution



'Marathon Man': Roy Scheider, Laurence Olivier

and atonement that float through the film. The fountain in which Babe and Elsa bathe each other's wounds after the assault in the park is conceivably the same one in front of which Doc is later killed. And the cleansing motif is neatly clinched by the ending, which has Babe conduct Szell at gunpoint to the control tower on the reservoir, where he taunts the Nazi by scattering his diamonds on the water, until Szell dies in a fall scrabbling after the gems and collapses face-down in the stream. It is not a conclusion which justifies all the shifting pretensions—or makes sense of all the wayward story elements—of what has gone before, but it at least halts the original's swift decline into cheap and nasty routine.

RICHARD COMBS

The Memory of Justice

At one point in *The Memory of Justice* (BBC-TV), Marcel Ophuls' wife regrets that her husband doesn't make something a little more cheerful, such as a musical. Ophuls obliges, ironically and in immediate effect exhilaratingly, setting the sounds of *The Band Wagon* against a car drive to sniff out a former Nazi. Later, his wife, who is German, is asked by a rather naive gathering of American youngsters whether she knew anyone in movements like the Hitler Youth. 'Well,' she says, 'there was me...' Later still, a Frenchwoman, a concentration camp survivor with some of the resilient splendour of a Simone Signoret, whose interview in present-day Paris has been intercut through the film in characteristic Ophuls fashion, is set before us as she was thirty years ago, being asked to speak a little more slowly in the witness box at Nuremberg. These moments—particularly the last, with its marvellous confrontation across the years—are the kind Ophuls revels in. They are specifically, almost ostentatiously cinematic; and what lifts Ophuls' combination of archive footage plus interview, and at the same time makes it hazardous, is his sense of the *coup du cinéma*.

Memory of Justice threads together the footage of Nuremberg itself (extremely rich and varied, with its off-guard glimpses of the dock, the bench and the paper-chasing lawyers), Ophuls' travels around modern Germany in search of attitudes to the past, references to Vietnam, and some brief ones to Algeria. His

theme is a discursive argument, often approached sidelong and by way of irony, about the meaning of war crimes and the attempts to confront them judicially. At Nuremberg, the victors tried the vanquished as individuals with a personal responsibility. In the Vietnam War, individuals who tried to exercise that responsibility, by exposing the atrocity of American actions, were liable to get short shrift. The victors came to Nuremberg with the stains of Hiroshima, Dresden, Katyn. It was Stalin who suggested simply shooting 50,000 Germans out of hand; Churchill who said that he would rather shoot himself; and Truman, with the (then) American faith in letting justice be seen to be done, who wanted the stage set for due process of law. The arguments pro and con Nuremberg, and the questions of what lessons it taught, have been rehearsed repeatedly over the years. They can be reduced to terms of the small change of the interview; but on that level they are reduced. Unlike *The Sorrow and the Pity*, this is not a film which may expect to add anything of great moment to the debate.

Given this, four-and-a-half hours is perhaps too long: a film of that weight seems to insist that at the end some major statement of substance should appear to have been made. But in effect, on closer inspection, major statements are often deceiving. The justification for the film's length is less in what it ultimately has to say than in the continuous fascination of the process, the interchanges between past and present, the accumulation of evidence, not all of it subjected to a historian's challenge, the sense of a great parade of witnesses.

There they all are again: Goering, dominating the dock, the silent Hess, Speer, so affable and reasonable, being asked (in the present) why he submits to so many interviews, Doenitz, interviewed in a close-up which emphasises the rat-trap tension of the tired old face, still denying knowledge. Telford Taylor, a young member of the American prosecution team, is seen laying out the case at Nuremberg, interviewed in the present, and caught on the tarmac of an airport, returning from Vietnam and giving evidence that American bombing had ravaged a Hanoi hospital. Lord Shawcross, looking every inch the embodiment of the British establishment (Ophuls is, as usual, more than adroit in the settings and set-ups he chooses for interviews) puts a lawyer's case.

But Ophuls of course casts the net more

widely. In the streets of a small German town, he waylays passers by, asking directions to the house of a woman doctor who has been practising there for years after her past as a concentration camp doctor. The people questioned shrug, know nothing, have nothing to say. And the viewer is likely to suspect that perhaps these stray encounters were set up, that Ophuls didn't simply happen to be driving along with a camera at the ready, having to ask the way. When he finally tracks the woman down, the camera stays outside the house while a (tape-recorded?) voice protests that she's ill, tired, has no wish to be interviewed. This sort of technique is highly effective and also a bit dubious; as so often, the investigative journalism of the screen leaves one conscious of the machinery, to a point where the machinery can look more interesting than the subject under investigation.

But with his own rather abrasive, stateless voice, Ophuls is a good interviewer, a back of the head presence in his own films, not afraid to ask either the difficult or the obvious questions. His films attempt neither historical neutrality nor partisanship, but a position somewhere between; that perhaps of a man trying to make up his mind through the process of film-making, and caught up in the ironies of all situations. And, of course, he has a mastery of how to exploit the medium, including the shifts between the colour of the present and the black and white of the past. One wonders, irrelevantly and shockingly, whether the Belsen newsreel would have looked even more monstrous in colour, or whether colour's insistence on space and background might have abstracted the horror. Undoubtedly, I suspect, the newsreel/interview film leaves a subliminal impression that the past was somehow a country of faded monochrome.

In the end, *Memory of Justice* seems bound to leave an impression that memory knows no justice and that justice has little memory. Commentators have fastened on the absurdity of the interview with one German with happy memories of a past (Nazi) in which there was much less crime. At the level of his own daily experience, he's perhaps quite justified; the man in the street has a boundless capacity for illusion about larger matters. But everyone who appears to be on the 'right' side is not necessarily making objective, informed statements either. Ophuls shapes his multi-layered material less as an historian than an essayist. What seems to strike him, among all the sinister, ironic and tragic echoes, is the resilience of the survivors.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

The Front

Over the years, the HUAC investigations and the Hollywood blacklist have provided potent material for books of autobiography or history, television documentaries, novels, plays, and—probably most numerous of all—student theses. Almost the only outlet untapped has been the conventional Hollywood movie, the place where the trouble first began. Perhaps the industry needed Watergate to become fully receptive to its past follies; at any rate we now have *The Front* (Columbia-Warner), which takes a fictional look at the curious ways scriptwriters survived during the dark and crazy 1950s—a time when an Academy Award for *The Brave Bulls* could be won by a non-blacklisted and non-existent Robert Rich (otherwise Dalton Trumbo, who also submitted work under the names of Sally Stubblefield, Marcel Klauber and Les Crutchfield).

Several cast and crew members of *The Front* went through the madness at first hand. The writer Walter Bernstein and Martin Ritt were blacklisted in 1950 and 1951 respectively after working together on *Danger*, a television series whose sponsors were eager to keep the political



'The Front': Woody Allen

opinions of the creative staff as antiseptic as their product (toothpaste). Zero Mostel was blacklisted in 1950 and hauled before the Committee five years later, treating it to a rare display of zany truculence ('I was signed to a contract with Twentieth Century-Fox. Or is it the Eighteenth Century-Fox? I don't recall'); here he revisits aspects of his past by playing TV performer Hecky Brown, whose life disintegrates after he's dropped by his employers. In the early 50s Woody Allen, however, was a comparative strapping, and his lack of first-hand experience is cleverly exploited in the character he plays—one Howard Prince, restaurant cashier and part-time bookmaker and, by his own admission, 'practically illiterate'. After the blacklist is explained to him by his old school chum Alfred Miller (Michael Murphy), he asks brightly, 'Who can you sue?' But he soon latches on to another solution: for ten per cent of the writer's fee he could put his own name on Alfred's scripts and everyone would theoretically be happy.

In practice things work out differently, and it's fascinating to observe how. The tone, by necessity, seesaws between ludicrous comedy and pathetic tragedy. Howard's nervous seizures when asked to revise a script on the spot (the Gas sponsors have complained about a concentration camp scene) are complemented by Hecky Brown's morose fury when asked to repent of his former indiscretions. Both moods ring true, though in the final analysis they don't balance up very satisfactorily. Mostel's performance as usual seems designed to reach the back row of the theatre balcony, and his extravagant displays of self-pity weigh the film down heavily,

'The Bad News Bears': Walter Matthau



particularly when he sings and toasts his mirror image with champagne before taking a suicide dive out of a hotel window.

They also clash totally with the nervous, intimate style of Woody Allen, who turns Howard Prince into an ingenious variation on his usual screen persona. There is the same obsession with role playing, the intellectual pretensions, the tentative relationships with women (Howard falls for Florence, the script editor on his TV series). Many lines of dialogue have the same laconic craziness and Jewish bite (where the biggest sin in Florence's family was to raise one's voice, the biggest sin in Howard's—so he says—was to buy retail). Yet Allen's lightweight presence never seriously sabotages the character of the film. When the script manoeuvres him into serious situations (confronting Hecky, for instance, or observing his mourners leaving the hotel from the opposite side of the street), his performing skills support him admirably. A definite false note is only struck right at the end, when he is led away handcuffed and casts a fond smile at Florence—a smile which inescapably recalls the vacant silly smiles he throws at Diane Keaton during the course of *Love and Death*.

Ritt's direction is typically measured and meticulous, with no stylistic jiggery-pokery intruding on the conflicts or emotions of the scenes. Such an approach undoubtedly has its old-fashioned charm, yet to some extent it works against the film. Without any visual camouflage, the patterning of scenes is frequently revealed as baldly melodramatic and conventional; there is little sense, too, of paranoid nightmare—though the mood makes a token appearance in a tiny scene where Harry Stone the actor hurries down a corridor trying to persuade the studio's hired investigator that he isn't Harry Stone the director. Ritt supplies recognisably accurate detail; but one can't help wondering what the subject might have become in the more forceful hands of, say, Pakula.

GEOFF BROWN

The Bad News Bears

Sustained by an individual and highly polished standard of comic invention, *The Bad News Bears* (CIC) remains easily the most accessible and tidily complete of the four feature films (the others being *Downhill Racer*, *The Candidate* and *Smile*) in which Michael Ritchie has developed and extended his ruminations on the peculiarly American requirements for winning in sports, politics and pageant. Unlike its more quizzical and open-ended predecessors, *The Bad News Bears* is an unmistakably commercial picture (the kind, Ritchie intended, to make an audience 'feel good'); it has the straightforward attraction of a sentimental yet witty script, an oddball cast of unaffected and genuinely engaging boys, and two old-fashioned stars, Tatum O'Neal and Walter Matthau, skilfully rehearsing their respective images of tough precocity and lovable misanthropy.

The movie opens with a high shot of an empty baseball diamond bathed in a soft California haze; it is the beginning of the Little League season and snatches of animated off-screen conversation mix with the click of irrigation sprinklers. The reassuring expectations raised by this idyllic piece of scene-setting are promptly undercut, however, by the arrival of the decrepit Morris Buttermaker (Walter Matthau); pulling up in a battered convertible, he downs a can of beer laced with bourbon and contemplates the ball park with a heartfelt gloom, stemming, we subsequently learn, from the memory of his own undistinguished years as a professional ball player.

Bribed to coach the Bears, a keen but desperately untalented team of misfits, the drunken Buttermaker fails to prevent their shameful defeat in the opening game against the favoured Yankees. Afterwards he sheepishly apologises:



The last scene of 'Noroît': Bernadette Lafont, Geraldine Chaplin

'Come on, guys, it's only a game...' But the Great American Pastime is, of course, more than that; it is, Ritchie spells out with a boldness aimed perhaps at compensating for the idea's unoriginality, an ethical and ultimately questionable conceit for the American way of life. (On the back of the Bears' uniform is an outline of the Liberty Bell and the slogans 'Chico's Bail Bonds' and 'Let Freedom Ring': a characteristically dense and off-hand sight-gag which ironically juxtaposes youthful ambition, the law and one of the country's founding principles with the less idealistic commercialism of advertising, sport and immigrant free enterprise.)

We comfortably anticipate that the Bears will pull through, however, when Buttermaker, angered by his nominal dismissal as coach, bribes a winning pitcher, Manda Whurlizer (Tatum O'Neal) into joining the team; Manda recruits the neighbourhood's tearaway ace athlete (Jackie Earle Haley) and together they carry their inept team-mates into the final against the Yankees. But in the course of this game, Buttermaker, who is now consumed with the ugly desire to win at all costs, sees his selfishness mirrored in the behaviour of the Yankees' coach. With only the last inning to redeem himself, Buttermaker refuses to play the two stars but instead sends out his least promising and most neglected players; the Bears are beaten, but their perverse self-respect as honourable losers is restored.

There is nothing strikingly original in the way Bill Lancaster's script leads Buttermaker to the commonplace conclusion that winning is less important than how the game is played. *The Bad News Bears* is distinguished, however, by the deftness with which Ritchie compresses and highlights the narrative. His humour is largely drawn from close observation, with most of the action concentrated exclusively in the ball park. Ritchie uses few comic set-ups, the laughs being more often achieved by a barrage of oblique one-take sight-gags (Engelberg, the Bears' balloon-like catcher, tosses Buttermaker a ball covered with chocolate, and later carelessly bites a candy bar without removing the wrapper); repeat shots capitalising on anticipated amusement (a catch is dropped again and again in the same way); and a simple but consistent deployment of the silent movie dictum that there are few actions funnier than demonstrable incompetence (a worried boy in a bright yellow uniform, with goggle spectacles and a shock of hair, vainly striving to connect bat and ball).

This is not one of Hollywood's fashionable nostalgic-allusion pictures, and Ritchie judiciously limits his references to professional baseball; he employs, however, an elliptical

method which removes the tedium from a sport frequently lacking observable drama. The core of the film's sustained humour stems from a bold juxtaposition of human types (the heterogeneous Bears are a continuously argumentative team), but the swiftly episodic style leaves the boys little time for individual self-indulgence. The considerable charm of this vigorous entertainment (for at base that is what it remains) derives not so much from the booming tones of Walter Matthau's familiar lolloping performance or Tatum O'Neal's tomboy wiles, but rather from Ritchie's ability to communicate his transparent affection for a sport with the reputation of being as incomprehensible to Britons as the New York subway is to out-of-towners.

JOHN PYM

LONDON FESTIVAL

Although we go to press too early to report on the 1976 London Festival in any detail, four films first shown at the Festival are reviewed here—Jacques Rivette's 'Noroît', Jiri Menzel's 'Seclusion Near a Forest', Miguel Littin's 'Letters from Marusia', John Cassavetes' 'The Killing of a Chinese Bookie'.

Noroît

If each new Rivette film marks a decisive break as much as a discernible development, Part III in the projected *Scènes de la Vie Parallèle*—the second film made in the tetralogy—reinforces this principle with a vengeance. Receiving its world première at the London Festival, immediately after a screening of *Duelle* (Part II of the cycle, discussed in my Edinburgh article elsewhere in this issue), *Noroît* has already occasioned the sort of extreme realignments provoked by *Spectre* after *L'Amour fou*, or by *Duelle* after *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*. Rather like the pitiless Chuck-a-Luck in *Rancho Notorious*, enlisting new players and expelling old ones with every spin of the wheel, Rivette's precarious game has always been predicated on enormous risks; but unlike that vertical roulette board, it is not necessarily played to be won. Demonstrating this fact with shocking clarity, *Noroît* enters a treacherous, kaleidoscopic no-man's-land where the very notion of judgment in any ordinary sense—the director's or ours—largely seems beside the point. The old-fashioned term for this realm is 'experiment'.

What are some of its ingredients? (1) A pirate tale fashioned out of diverse parts of *Moonfleet*, *House of Bamboo*, various samurai sagas and Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, set on 'A small island in the Atlantic, off the coast of a larger one' in no locatable period, and structured, like *Duelle*, on the successive elimination of every character, developing towards a confrontation between a moon ghost and a sun fairy. (2) A few English lines of Tourneur, violently wrenched out of context and recited by the avenging ghost Morag (Geraldine Chaplin) and/or her accomplice Erika (Kika Markham), as incantation, simple quotation, or in a hammy style suggesting *Land of the Pharaohs*—playing, like the French dialogue, on a variety of uncanny emotional registers which, along with facial and body movements, range from the nightmarish to the parodic. (3) Music improvised by a visible trio who contrive to blend 'modern' and 'primitive' elements on an assortment of instruments, with a use of direct sound throughout offering another broad palette of possibilities, from the wind and sea to the squeaks and swishes of the lavender leather pants suit worn by Giulia (Bernadette Lafont), sun fairy and head of the pirate clan. (4) A systematic development towards ritual, dance, fantasy, gibberish and total abstraction of the narrative, with camera distance and darkness—coupled with facial masks, red filters and silent 16 mm black-and-white footage in the aggressive last sequence—periodically making it difficult or impossible to identify certain characters, transforming the co-ordinates into those of pure spectacle.

Noroît contains the most beautiful images and sounds of any Rivette film, and the fewest indications of what a spectator is meant to do with them, apart from look and listen. While the plot is generally easier to follow than in *Duelle*, the shifting levels of mood and tone produce a sustained uncertainty of response—reaching an apotheosis in the mutual stabbing and subsequent laughter of Giulia and Morag in the final shot, which perfectly encapsulate the film's clashes and contradictions. On the level of identification, a subjective pan from beach to fortress in the first sequence initially designates Morag as the viewer's reference point. But in a film that is executed according to principles of discontinuity, plot itself—by sheer virtue of its continuity—eventually becomes the least relevant aspect of its experience. And by the time Morag is back on the beach near the film's end, and a comparable pan across the Atlantic is abruptly introduced in the middle of another camera movement following Erika round a room in the fortress, the subjective reference has significantly been raised—or reduced—to the level of abstraction, like a phrase in a foreign tongue.

A great many of the preoccupations can be traced back to Rivette's seminal review of Lang's *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 76, nineteen years ago. There one finds the notion of a 'totally closed universe' (all the more paradoxical in *Noroît*, which abounds in spectacular vistas and spacious interiors), where a director who 'always looks for the truth beyond the probable... looks for it here by entering the improbable.' Equally present is an aesthetic of self-destruction, whereby each scene is restricted to a procession of 'pure moments' in which anything that might fix them to reality is 'reduced to the condition of pure spatio-temporal reference, without embodiment' and 'the characters have lost all individual value, are no more than human concepts,' defined only by what they say or do—the strictly material space and existential duration in which an actor moves.

These are of course the conditions of the theatre rehearsal, examined at length in *Paris Nous Appartient*, *L'Amour fou* and *Spectre*, where the actual end-point of 'performance' is never reached. The radical departure of *Noroît* is to resume that inquiry (with improvised



'Seclusion Near a Forest'

music assuming the role of the relatively 'fixed' percussion in *L'Amour fou* and *Spectre*, thereby increasing the sense of perpetual try-out) without the narrative-illusionist pretext of the rehearsal to 'place' it, apart from a few perverse instances that work more as displacements: Morag's murder of Regina, which serves as 'rehearsal' for its re-enactment by Erika and Morag before Giulia and her court; the rehearsed sword-fight between Ludovico (Larrio Ekson) and Jacob (Humbert Balsan), merging imperceptibly along with the music into a performance staged to confound Erika.

The most characteristic rhythmical pattern set by the delivery of lines and music, the movements of actors and camera, is one of stopping and starting, with odd-shaped pauses falling in between, while the tempi often tend to be either slower or faster than those favoured in most Western dramaturgy, and somewhat closer to ones associated with dramatic and ceremonial forms found in Japan. Both these strategies converge in the climactic 'masked ball', lit by bonfires and punctuated by pageant-like repetitions—a choreography of confrontations and crossing vectors isolated in time and space, whose counterpart in *Duelle* is the central dance hall sequence, where the mirror breaks and the goddesses meet.

The madness and hysteria of the Tower of Babel is basic to every Rivette film; the maniacal giggling in *Céline et Julie* which irritates some spectators is merely one of the less sinister manifestations of it. Until now, each film has distanced this aspect by providing the audience with a phenomenological world to cling to; even *Duelle*, thanks to its cosy film noir references, nostalgic piano music and Cocteau quotations, intermittently allows one to 'enter' its reinvented Paris as a potential inhabitant. But the increasing move away from any semblance of 'lived experience' in *Norvôit*—making it a much more exciting and daring work in some respects—ultimately implies little more than a 'documentary' of a *tournage* and *montage* on the one hand, a capitulation to Babel itself on the other. Acknowledging the brilliance of William Lubtchansky's photography, the precision of the frontal camera movements and long takes, the caustic bite of Eduardo de Gregorio's dialogue, the dancer's grace of Ekson, the chilling laughter of Lafont, the howls and mimes of Chaplin, the beauty of Markham, the savage power of the music—and, above all, the continual shifting of gears, placing one at a

tangent to all these elements as they struggle independently or collectively towards representation—one is nevertheless obliged to ask just where Rivette's experimentation is headed.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Seclusion Near a Forest

Very much in evidence in *Seclusion Near a Forest*, Jiri Menzel's extraordinary ability to weave something out of nothing is all the more welcome after last year's Party-line penance, *Who Seeks a Handful of Gold*, which by all accounts wove something (boy meets girl but gets tractor) into nothing. Looking back, doubtless with slightly rose-tinted memories, across the eight-year hiatus of political difficulties centring on the total suppression of *Larks on a String* in 1970, one is tempted to see *Seclusion Near a Forest* as pussyfooting warily through paths beset with dangers.

In fact, exactly like *Closely Observed Trains* and *Capricious Summer*, it is a gossamer web set to ensnare the endearing foibles of ordinary, unheroic human beings who are content merely to dream of the wonders they might achieve, provided one moment of magic—a miraculous cure for 'ejaculatio praecox', a vision of beauty fluttering out of reach high on a tightrope—sustains the illusion that their lives have really added up to something after all.

In *Seclusion Near a Forest*, the illusion is simply the charm of rustic simplicity. With a view to buying a summer cottage, a young couple venture forth with their two children from the familiar bustle of the city (the first image in the film is of a red traffic light) into an alien picture-book paradise of green fields, bosky woods and thatched cottages enfolded by sheltering foliage. 'How romantic!' they murmur ecstatically. But their guide through this old world is, like themselves, a refugee from the new; known as The Miller, proud caretaker of a museum piece, he religiously assumes the meerschaum pipe and peaked cap of his trade (pre-dusted with flour from a shaker) before sallying forth to explain how this fine example of a flour-mill, now preserved in amber, once used to work.

The world we then gradually enter is one self-consciously submitting to metamorphosis. Cows still have to be milked and haystacks built, but with one eye on their prosperous city

brethren, the peasants mostly spend their visible hours in picturesque celebration (a funeral, a family feast) or regaling visitors with rustic lore (how to throw a sweat-stained waistcoat over an adder—'The snake gets a shock'—before killing it with your bare hands). Literally dying away, the ageing peasantry presents a choice of cottages for prospective buyers; and these cottages are quickly subjected to improvement by all mod. cons., with barns modernised into suburban villas and unwanted fields turned over to the local cooperative for development. Catch 22 for romantic exiles, however, is that the occupants craftily reserve the right to go on living in their homes until they die.

In one such cottage open warfare has been declared, with the new owners blocking chimneys and digging moats by the front door, while the old ones retaliate by mixing nails (death to car-tyres) with the chickenfeed. Newer at the game, the hero and heroine simply wait politely for their 70-year-old host to die (their hopes considerably crushed by an encounter with his remarkably hale 92-year-old father); and the longer they wait, the more inextricably the old man, delightedly annexed by the children as a grandfather, becomes part of the family. As one of the children puts it with unwelcome candour in a school essay, 'He's very kind, but he's in the way'.

Kept embedded almost out of sight within a non-stop stream of jokes, as the characters obliviously pursue their private eccentricities while two cultures clash in amiable opposition round them, this problem finally surfaces to be resolved by a pirouette. The old man succumbs to a bout of pneumonia; arriving to mourn, his tenants find him totally restored; and half-delighted, half-bemused, they are left to contemplate further seasons of shared occupancy. But, though sustained by the sense of reconciliation in this final scene, the romantic illusion remains shadowed by the suspicion that by next year, in spite of everything, trouble will be brewing over embers of frustration and improvements will already be mooted.

'Once upon a time,' runs the fairytale in the old man's favourite radio programme, 'there was a kingdom and its inhabitants were all really happy people.' In this kingdom, which might well be Menzel's, the king's three sons set out to find a wise man; and like them, Menzel can find only people who are 'neither wise nor stupid, cowardly nor brave, bad nor good.' His charm is that he realises the extent to which each of them, in an unfriendly world, retains his reasons, his humanity, and his private experience of magic.

TOM MILNE

Letters from Marusia

The massacre at Marusia does not exist in official Chilean history books. Miguel Littin says he heard the story from a friend, who heard it from another friend killed by the junta in 1973. This friend had in turn heard it from a guard at an abandoned saltpetre mine in the north. Not without a certain historical irony, the genesis of the story provides also the message of its telling. Popular memory is a force more powerful than official record; and in Latin America, where illiteracy is wholesale, the image speaks louder than the text.

Which is one reason why Littin's film must not be measured by the yardstick of sophisticated political cinema. *Letters from Marusia* (made in Mexico, where Littin has lived in exile from his native Chile since Allende's overthrow) is more litany than narrative, and does not deal in subtleties of political nuance. Its canvas is painted black and white, and will be lost on those who prefer their history in shades of grey. The film itself is coloured ochre, from the dust which blankets the mining regions of northern Chile. Here, in 1907, a mining

community was slaughtered by the Chilean army, with the active connivance of the mine's owners, who happened to be British. The massacre is provoked by a strike, the fuse lit by a casual act of murder, arbitrarily avenged by the soldiers who keep order for their foreign masters. The miners' response—a soldier's throat is slit—brings savage reprisal, and the cycle of retribution is set in motion. As the firing squads are augmented, so the miners step up their violence.

These sporadic acts of violence are filmed episodically, but with a rhythmical, point counterpoint precision. Visually, the conflict is staged in blocks of movement, with the camera distanced from the events. The style is reminiscent of an Italian Western—Leone without the close-ups. Groups of miners stand statuesque in the dust; black-cloaked women straddle a ridge, bursting into applause as below them their men fall to the soldiers' bullets and the yellow rocks are spattered with blood. Gradually, one man is isolated from the orchestrated chaos: Gregorio (Gian Maria Volonté), who has seen his woman killed in another massacre (Iquique, the central event of the Cuban film *Cantata de Chile*) and looks beyond the impotence of anarchic violence to the organised power of collective resistance. Through his persuasion the workers begin to see that their strength lies in a mass strike, a course of action dynamically vindicated in a *coup de théâtre*, as hundreds of men gather in the town square, sticks of dynamite fastened to their belts. The army is momentarily paralysed, and waits on a regiment of reinforcements.

It is the workers' only victory, and is short-lived. The regiment arrives, temporarily delayed when a group of women stop their train by lying on the tracks and an over-exuberant colonel shoots the only driver for refusing to run the train over them. Soon after the town is bombed (better lose one mine than risk the insurrection spreading across the pampas, the colonel explains to the British owner). Mass executions celebrate the army's triumph; Gregorio is captured in a theatre, tortured and killed. But two men have escaped, carrying the notes he has written about the strike and its tactics. The message will ensure the survival of collective memory. Defeated, the miners have at least found a strength of their own. When will they realise they are weaker, says the colonel, though there are so many of them.

Gregorio is not so much a character as a catalyst. His background is briefly sketched in flashback—he is one of the thousands who came from the towns of the south to find work in the rainless wasteland of the north—but once in Marusia he merges into the mass, periodically surfacing as an off-centre organiser and persuader (it doesn't quite work, since Volonté's presence just overcomes his self-effacement). This off-centredness reflects the film's choral structure, most graphically demonstrated when a group of women are seen washing clothes and their words are passed from one to another along the line, building from whispered confusion to a crescendo of decision. The final sequence recapitulates this collective voice, as Gregorio's words about the need for united action echo over the figures of the men carrying his message to another place. And to another time, sixty years on, in the same country.

DAVID WILSON

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie

In its diffuse, freakish way, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (Jo Lustig) may be John Cassavetes' most infuriating, unclassifiable and intriguing project to date. A black thriller, about the owner of a struggling Los Angeles strip club who gets into debt with the Syndicate and must buy his way out with murder, the film's drive towards bloody mayhem and double-

cross is constantly diverted by the behavioural complexity Cassavetes allows his characters and the generosity he extends to his actors. The tension between the two in fact seems to be responsible for the strangely unrealised, half-formed ambience of the film. While Cassavetes' style continues to insist on total involvement, thrusting the audience close to a crowd of faces and free-floating encounters, his story for once struggles to exist independently, and to impose a distance on the people.

It is almost as if, having previously explored the anxieties and tyrannies of close-up communication, steadily refining them down to the alienated essence of one in *A Woman Under the Influence*, Cassavetes needed to move out into the communal fantasy of a genre film. And the rough-cut, impressionistic movement he imposes—from the early, dreamlike sequences of Cosmo Vitelli (Ben Gazzara) at work and play, to his eerie Chinatown sortie for the killing he is forced to carry out—emphasises the fantasy of the gangster element even as the camera lingers to capture the 'spontaneous' reality of gestures and expressions. Cosmo's club, 'The Crazy Horse West', in particular seems to exist in some extravagant limbo, too self-sufficient and unglamorously documented in its drearily gaudy efforts at titillation to serve precisely as a metaphor for its owner's self-immolating state of mind, yet too clearly a figment of his dream of a 'golden life' to be taken comfortably at a literal level.

A consequent anomaly, crucial to the unnerving, unfocused fascination of the film, is the extent to which, even while the screws of the plot are being turned tighter and Cosmo is becoming more and more a doomed *film noir* hero, the characters drift free of events as Cassavetes insists on their autonomy as 'performers'. There are hints of this in Cosmo's first brushes with the gangsters (an ill-assorted group, including such familiar faces and free-form characters as Seymour Cassel and Timothy Carey), given a particular twist in the scene where they go into an anxious huddle in a night-time eatery, and it is suggested to Cosmo that he might take care of his \$23,000 debt by eliminating another bad debtor, an elderly Chinese bookie who has proved unreachable in his well-defended bastion. Here the threatening chumminess shades into something like the self-sufficient play-acting and little challenges of Cassavetes' previous friendships and groupings,

releasing energies not shaped by the needs of the drama.

After Cosmo has carried out his assignment, and it becomes clear that he has been set up, that the bookie was in fact a powerful gangland figure and that Cosmo must now be eliminated by the men who hired him, the plot continues to fade rather than to wind the hero tighter into the traditional narrative toils. Although wounded, Cosmo remains impervious to the attempts on his life, as though he had somehow become comfortable with his part as hit-man. The film's texture opens out to accommodate more bits of business from characters let loose on the delicious absurdity of their roles, and the thriller component is effectively rubbed away by the parody scene of a lengthy chase through an underground garage. Cosmo returns to his first preoccupation, his club, declares his philosophy that to be happy is to be at ease with the roles one plays for others to hide from oneself, and then stands outside the club, absently smearing the blood now soaking through his clothes from a wound which he has been told could kill him. This shot—the last we see of Cosmo—ambiguously summarises both the *noir* hero, fated to self-destruction when he asserts himself in a corrupt world, and a man who has fought his way through to being comfortable.

Part and parcel of the film's emphasis on the texture of 'performance' is its toying with atmosphere through lighting. These strange fluctuations in the look of the film are more than just mood effects, and seem to define what is going on more closely than the action or dialogue. Apart from the many scenes played out in multi-coloured washes of neon, there is the oddly unsettling sequence of Cosmo's expensive night on the town, during which the film passes from the bright light of late afternoon to the bright light of early morning. In between is not a hint of genuine night light—only the clinical whiteness of the room where Cosmo waits to be questioned about his losses. The effects seem to fill the screen with strange, discordantly coloured bubble worlds, as chilling in the flickering glow they shed on these lives as the chiaroscuro menace of gangster tradition. And in its own perverse, wayward fashion, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* is perhaps the most original contribution to that genre for some time.

RICHARD COMBS

'Letters from Marusia'





SOME TIME IN THE SUN

By Tom Dardis

ANDRE DEUTSCH, £5.50

Until fairly recently, the only screenwriters whose work has consistently attracted much attention have been those with reputations as playwrights or novelists. With a few exceptions (Mayer, Prévert, Zavattini, T. E. B. Clarke, etc.), writers committed solely to the cinema have been little celebrated by critics and entirely unknown to the movie-going public. However, things are now changing, and a systematic revaluation of the writers' role in the American cinema has been initiated by Richard Corliss in his books *The Hollywood Screenwriters* and *Talking Pictures*, which set out quite consciously to do for writers what Andrew Sarris' advocacy in the 1960s did for Hollywood directors.

Tom Dardis' *Some Time in the Sun* belongs halfway between the traditional interest in big literary names engaged in movie-making and this new concern for the centrality of the screenwriter's role. His book is made up of essays on the Hollywood experiences of Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Nathaniel West, Aldous Huxley and James Agee, based mainly on published sources but containing some new material from interviews and script archives. His subjects have been chosen more for their eminence as novelists than for their contributions to the cinema, and minor supporting roles are still assigned to those very figures Corliss seeks to bring to the centre of our vision—such as Nunnally Johnson (who produced and re-wrote Faulkner's scripts at Fox) and Jules Furthman (who did most of the work on Faulkner's two major credits, *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*).

But Dardis' book isn't another literary bellyache about sensitive artists caught up in a cruelly exploitative system. His study was triggered off by a conversation with Anthony Powell, in which the English novelist recalled an encounter with Fitzgerald in Hollywood. Fitzgerald appeared cheerful, healthy, optimistic and deeply concerned about making a success of movie writing, and this suggested to Dardis that he probably wasn't as unhappy in Hollywood as has often been made out. (Dardis does not appear to know that Powell wrote an account of this meeting for *The Times* in 1970; a fuller version will no doubt appear in the second volume of his mem-

oirs.) Dardis therefore set out to re-examine Fitzgerald's Hollywood years, and those of his other subjects, from this refreshingly unjaundiced perspective; and while his book contains no startling insights, he does present Hollywood in a more favourable light than is customary in the works of literary observers.

Unlike a good many writers drawn into working for the cinema, these five always gave of their best—even if their best was not always appropriate to the job in hand. In the dispute between Fitzgerald and Joseph Mankiewicz over the mawkish early drafts of *Three Comrades*, the latter was clearly right; nevertheless he has never quite managed to kill the charge of philistine interference with genius that has pursued him down the years. Even more embarrassing is Faulkner's unused script for the wartime morale booster *The De Gaulle Story*.

Of the five, only the lifelong cineaste James Agee wrote anything substantial for the screen; the scripts for *The African Queen* and *The Night of the Hunter* remain a pleasure to read, and the latter was the blueprint for a minor masterpiece. Dardis does his best for Faulkner, whom Hawks just liked to have around, but can't find more than wisps of evidence. West as we know was gaining an increasing command of the medium and was never employed for his name. Critical judgment is not, however, Dardis' strong suit, and one cannot take very seriously his claim that in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*, Huxley left behind 'a small legacy of two absolutely first-rate screenplays that have never been surpassed for what they attempted and succeeded in doing so well.'

Except for Agee, then, they got more out of Hollywood than they gave—most tangibly money (in amounts ranging from two thousand dollars a week to a mere two hundred) to subsidise their personal work, but also contact with a different world and (especially in the cases of West and Fitzgerald) vital new material for their fiction. In no serious sense could they be said to have been exploited, contaminated or humiliated.

For all its amiable urbanity, Dardis' book is pretty thin and bland. He loses sight very early on of where his theme might be taking him, and he never faces the central question of why most writers seem to have hated Hollywood so, and have thus created an imaginative

history of the movie colony, a persuasive body of literature now covering a period of fifty years, that is largely hostile to the film industry. Moreover, while reading his book one is constantly wishing to hear less about the familiar careers of Fitzgerald and West and more about some of the minor Hollywood figures who cross their paths.

I'd like to know much more, for instance, about Horace McCoy, author of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, who was at Republic with West and later wrote the *M* remake for Losey and *The Lusty Men* for Ray. Another intriguing figure is Daniel Fuchs, one of Dardis' main sources for new information on his subjects. Fuchs was a highly promising novelist (widely acclaimed for his 'Williamsburg trilogy', though they only sold a total of 2,000 copies) before going to Hollywood in 1937. After that he wrote a mere handful of stories before re-emerging thirty-five years later with the disappointing Hollywood novel *West of the Rockies*. Fuchs' far from abundant screen credits are not all that impressive, yet not without interest (the best are on Siodmak's *Criss Cross*, Kazan's *Panic in the Streets*, Sirk's *Interlude*). And one asks oneself what kind of life did he lead, and how had Hollywood affected his talent? Fuchs might just be that rare creature everyone has been searching for all these years—the truly major writer who was sidetracked from his vocation by the lure of Hollywood.

PHILIP FRENCH

THE BLUE DAHLIA

Edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli

ELM TREE BOOKS, £3.95

RAYMOND CHANDLER ON SCREEN

By Stephen Pendo

SCARECROW PRESS, NEW JERSEY, \$10.00

The Chandler industry rolls on, and only this industry (remnants division) really justifies a hard-cover publication, very sparsely illustrated with studio publicity stills, of the capable but not very remarkable script Raymond Chandler wrote 32 years ago for *The Blue Dahlia*. The script had to be finished in a hurry, with shooting already well advanced, because of Alan Ladd's departure on military service; Chandler couldn't manage it sober but completed it drunk, with relays of secretaries on call, studio Cadillacs at the door and a doctor in attendance. Afterwards, he wore 'the modest smile of a gravely wounded hero who has shown courage far beyond the call of duty.'

The phrase comes from John Houseman's introduction—brief, elegant, feline and good value. Matthew Bruccoli's afterword adds some details, including Chandler's resigned note that 'what the Navy Department did to the story was a little thing like making me change the murderer and hence making a routine whodunit out of a fairly

original idea.' The murderer was to have been the brain-scrambled sailor played by William Bendix; war heroes, it seems, were not seen by the Navy Department as behaving in that fashion.

Houseman's introduction gently suggests that Chandler was not the easiest man to work with. While engaged on *Double Indemnity*, he issued a severe and lengthy ultimatum to Paramount, detailing grievances against his collaborator, Billy Wilder. They included Wilder's habit of swishing or pointing a malacca cane, and of giving Chandler such 'arbitrary and personal' orders as 'Ray, will you please open that window.' But Chandler liked Houseman because he was the only other British public school man on the Paramount lot: 'When he appeared in my office at lunchtime, seeking relief from the pressures of the glib and forceful men with whom he was working, I think he was hoping to recapture with me, for a few moments, the sounds and memories of his childhood.'

Also off the Chandler production line comes Stephen Pendo's *Raymond Chandler on Screen*, which works a pedestrian passage through the novel adaptations, from *Farewell, My Lovely* in 1945 to the remake thirty years later. Mr. Pendo is hardly a stimulating writer ('The filmic Marlowe has distinct traits and it is now appropriate to summarise the movie version of the hero' is the point he has guardedly reached by page 200), and in the American thesis tradition he buttresses his text with footnotes and seldom risks one word where he can find reason for two. But he has done his homework, and novel-to-film plot comparisons, production details and so on are useful. Chandler, who was by no means detached about his own reputation as a writer, might find it ironic (though unsurprising) that he rides into history in tandem with Humphrey Bogart—he, of course, preferred Dick Powell's Marlowe.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

FILM AND REVOLUTION

By James Roy MacBean

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$15.00 (paperback \$4.95)

If film theory today exists in a vacuum, it may be partly the fault of some of those who practise it, with their wilful insistence on linguistic obscurantism and terminology appropriated from other disciplines, and their perverse reluctance to relate the theory to actual films. The gap between theory and practice has never been wider, and it is in this area that James Roy MacBean attempts to intervene. His approach, developed through analyses of films which he sees as posing theoretical issues in new ways, is explicitly Marxist.

Aware that the necessary terminology of Marxist criticism will sound an antipathetic chord in the minds of those who instinctively reject it as jargon, MacBean identifies this very rejection as part of the

process of what Marxists have termed the concept of ideology. This he characterises as 'a weapon used by the ruling class to inculcate in the masses the acceptance as a given of the existing relations of production which privilege one class at the expense of another.' In place of the confusions engendered by bourgeois ideology, pervasive enough to co-opt even an explicitly militant film into the commodity structure of the art market (consider the radical chic success of *Battle of Algiers*), MacBean counterposes the 'threatening clarity' of Marxist analysis.

His approach, as he acknowledges, derives from Althusser's reading of Marx. MacBean applies this reading to the cinema in terms of a materialist theory of knowledge. It is an approach which risks plunging into philosophical deep water. Mercifully, MacBean prefers to stay on land, confining himself to the rejection of Bazin's ontological realism which his own anti-illusionist theory demands. His chapter on the progress of critical theory since Bazin is significantly more of an attack on Bazin himself than an account of what has happened since. While acknowledging Bazin's capacity for putting theory into practice, he systematically disposes of him by pointing to the transcendentalist drift in Bazin's notion of reality ('For Bazin, all roads lead to the heavens').

But he is equally insistent that one theology should not replace another. The most provocative and closely argued section of *Film and Revolution* is a blistering onslaught on Metz and semiology, which MacBean rejects as 'little more than a taxonomy of the banal'. Not only, he argues, is Metz's 'ludicrously pedantic' writing so convoluted as to be inaccessible to all except those who ignore its inconsistencies and contradictions, it is also possibly even more dangerously mystificatory than bourgeois writing on film because its methodology rules out any consideration of the ideological function of cinematic images. By camouflaging the normative character of Metz's semiology, his apostles have failed to appreciate that Metzian semiology is itself eminently ideological: at best it prescribes an ontological reality and at worst it is an infinite tautology. A Rosebud, one might say, is a Rosebud is a Rosebud. That, for MacBean, is the end of the matter: exit Metz, covered in confusion. He is right to note semiology's obsession with the image and relative neglect of sound (and, one might add, its evident difficulty when confronted with a structural cinema which rejects the primacy of narrative); but the very virulence of his attack betrays an impatience with any methodology which might delay or even illuminate the implementing of his own.

On its own terms, however, his argument is consistent. It can scarcely fail to be, given his insistence that Godard, in *One Plus One*, has done precisely what Metz

regards as impossible—i.e., explored the seeming dialectical opposition between Eisenstein's principles of montage and Bazin's principles of *mise-en-scène*. The bulk of the book is a series of articles, most of them reprinted from *Film Quarterly*, on Godard from *Deux ou Trois Choses to Tout Va Bien*. Interestingly, MacBean sees the development of his own critical method as paralleling that of Godard (and Gorin). The early chapters provide evaluative accounts of Godard's middle period films up to *Weekend*, whose theme MacBean characterises as 'the purgative phase of the ritual cycle'—Godard as Artaud, pushing spectacle to its limit to reveal its inadequacy as significant discourse. The somewhat tentative approach is crystallised in MacBean's double take of *Le Gai Savoir*, which he first attacks as joylessly pedagogic and then—in an auto-critique written some months later—defends as Godard's movement away from representation and towards presentation, cinematic reality being not what is on the screen but the dialogue between screen and spectator.

While for the sympathetic reader it is illuminating to observe a writer actively formulating his critical method, MacBean's sweeping and largely uncritical acceptance of Marxism in the service of cinema does lead him into a number of blind alleys. This is most apparent in his chapters on films not by Godard. He finds *Ice* cold, but doesn't adequately define what he means by the 'emotion' he says it lacks. His account of the 'film act' of *The Hour of the Furnaces* leaves him wondering about the 'aesthetic merits' of a film whose makers would reject as illusory a distinction between form and content. And his failure convincingly to accommodate within his method films which are not explicitly revolutionary (Rossellini's *Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV*, Marcel Ophüls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*) means that his approach to these films is mostly descriptive, with the Marxist analysis lingering on the periphery when it ought to be central.

The book is sometimes the victim of its own enthusiasms. MacBean argues of *British Sounds*, for instance, that Godard's use of factory noise on the soundtrack of the first sequence demonstrates the usefulness of noise to the ruling class 'in maintaining the alienation of the workers as a means of preventing them from focusing their critical attention on the capitalist system as a whole'—which could suggest, though obviously MacBean doesn't mean it to, that socialist factories don't have noise. Like Godard (in fact like any Marxist), MacBean has a problem when it comes to reconciling the difference between Marx's projection of capitalist society and the way it has actually developed. Needless to say (but it needs saying), that doesn't rule out Marxism; but it does mean that Marxist analysis of the function of cinema in capitalist society has to be applied with

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caution, and with more rigour than is sometimes evident here. Nevertheless, for all its uncertainties, MacBean's book is an important contribution to the critical debate, which should provoke some hard thinking about the relation of cinema to ideology.

DAVID WILSON

Jacques Tati, by Penelope Gilliatt (Woburn Press, £2.95). A good example of Sunday supplement journalism, this thumbnail sketch—the first book in English devoted to Tati—shares roughly the same virtues and limitations as Gavin Millar's *Omnibus* programme on him last spring: a warm, ample sense of the comic's personality and opinions is coupled with a meagre grasp of his art. Basically derived from a *New Yorker* Profile, but decked out with a pleasant assortment of stills, Gilliatt's slim volume hops from interview material to favourite recollected gags and back again without so much as hinting at the radical complexity of any single shot and its accompanying sounds in any Tati film, restricting its focus to a set of stray details retrieved out of context. To settle for this sentimental reduction of Tati's genius is roughly tantamount to reducing *Ulysses* to Joseph Strick's greeting card version. But Hulot fans who feel that Tati's importance rests chiefly on his charm as a performer should have little cause for complaint.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Bugsy Malone

In his review of *Bugsy Malone* in the Autumn 1976 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Philip Strick said that the film had been made 'with no stars, no precedent and only the NFFC to support it'. It has been pointed out to us that there was a considerable Rank Organisation investment in the production (which they are also distributing), and we apologise for this mistake.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARTYN AUTY is programme officer with the Scottish Film Council and responsible for the regional film theatres in Scotland... ROSS CARE has written for *Millimeter* (New York) and *Cinefantastique* (Chicago) and is a composer with some experience in scoring independent films... WILLARD MANUS is an American novelist and freelance writer who has lived for a number of years in Greece... KEN MOSKOWITZ recently graduated from Swarthmore College, where he made and reviewed films; has written for *The Velvet Light Trap*... JOHN PYM is a London freelance journalist, contributes to the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and has written on the history of Hollywood... ELIZABETH GROTTLE STREBEL received her PhD from Princeton for a dissertation on French cinema in the 1930s in relation to the Popular Front; has written for the French film review *Ecran* and the *Journal of Contemporary History*... ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND is a freelance journalist and translator.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

UNITED ARTISTS for *New York, New York, Red River, Wake in Fright* (Outback).
COLUMBIA-WARNER for *A Clockwork Orange, Barry Lyndon, Sunday Too Far Away, The Front*.
CIC for *Face to Face, Marathon Man, The Bad News Bears*.
CIC/MGM for 2001.
FOX-RANK for *Beware! The Blob*.
CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*.
GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Die Marquise von O...*
EXCALIBUR for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.
ARTIFICIAL EYE/RAI for *The Spider's Stratagem*.
20th CENTURY-FOX for *Julia*.
20th CENTURY-FOX/STANLEY BIELECKI for *Star Wars*.
PENTHOUSE FILMS INTERNATIONAL for *Gore Vidal's Caligula*.
WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS for *The Band Concert, The Whoopie Party, Woodland Café, Music Land, The Old Mill, Pinocchio*, photographs of Wilfred Jackson and group round piano.
MIRISCH/PEA/JALEM for photograph of Billy Wilder.
EMI for *The Go-Between*.
WARNER BROS. for photograph of Busby Berkeley.
A.B.P.C. for *Stage Fright*.
SUNCHILD PRODUCTIONS for *Duelle, Noroit*.
AGNES DELAHAYE PRODUCTION for *Pickpocket, Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*.
PARC/ARGOS for photograph of Robert Bresson.
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FILM CORPORATION/GTO for *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.
ANTHONY BUCKLEY PRODUCTIONS for *Caddie*.
MAD DOG PTY/MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTIONS for *Mad Dog*.
JOHN THOMAS/CHARLES THOMAS for *Thundercrack*.
GREEK FILM CENTRE for *Happy Day*.
GORKI STUDIO for *Zivet Takoj Paren*.
BARRANDOV FILM STUDIO for *Seclusion near a Forest*.
PUBLIC TELEVISION SERVICE for *Six Characters in Search of an Author, The Last of Mrs. Lincoln*.
LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION for *Upstairs, Downstairs*.
SHEFFIELD PHOTO COMPANY/JOHN MOTTERSHAW for *Robbery of a Mail Coach*.
THE SCIENCE MUSEUM, LONDON for photograph of Le Prince's camera/ projector.
KEN JACOBS for *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*.
MICHAEL SNOW for *Back and Forth*.
YVONNE RAINER for *Film about a Woman Who...*, *Kristina Talking Pictures*.
SOUTH AFRICAN FILM ARCHIVE for Boer War pictures.
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *The Great Consoler, Sylvia Scarlett, Weary Willie, The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle, Winky's Ruse*.

PRINTED BY The Whitefriars Press Ltd., London and Tonbridge, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES (4 issues) £2.70 including postage. Back issues 55p plus 18p postage. U.S.A. \$8.00. Price per copy in United States \$2.00. Back issues \$2.50. Binders to hold two years' issues £2.10 (\$5.00).

SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.

PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, 1st April, 1st July, and 1st October.

Letters

Other and Essential

SIR,—Your welcome survey of independent distributors, exhibitors, *Other and Essential* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1976), states that its intention 'is to be representative rather than comprehensive'. May I supplement it by drawing attention to an unrepresentative example of exhibition (even in the independent field) which with a tiny staff and on a financial shoe-string, succeeds in rivalling the variety and abundance of the National Film Theatre itself.

I refer to the late-night programmes at the Paris Pullman Cinema, which for over three years now have presented a different film (sometimes two films) on every night of every week—a total of better than 365 movies a year. The operation is independent of other film performances at the cinema, it was initiated and is run personally by Mr. James Quinn, and it gives the richest possible cross-section of cinema from every country, every period and every genre. No doubt it is significant that its progenitor is one of a number of past Directors under whose control the British Film Institute grew in the 50s and 60s from an acorn to an oak tree.

It remains to be seen whether other cinemas, which have been started with a generous measure of silver-spoon-feeding from Government funds, will serve the public as well. Far from being state assisted, this operation is heavily taxed, even though it returns little for the time and effort expended. In default of taxpayers' support, it at least deserves this admiring word from one who, while unconnected with it in any way, happens to know about it through being, at one remove, a somewhat somnolent partner in a related enterprise.

Yours faithfully,
RALPH STEPHENSON

London, S.W.4.

Television Biography

SIR,—I have read the long and interesting article by Norman Swallow in the Summer SIGHT AND SOUND, and would like to make a couple of small points in regard to Historical and Biographical Documentary. In August 1965 I proposed two films on writers to the BBC, which would utilise a method of dramatised reconstruction in which actors would play both fictional and factual characters. The two writers, Scott Fitzgerald and Colette, were chosen because both had used autobiographical elements in their work. Each film

would therefore be an investigation into the interface between fact and fiction. This approach was at first rejected. Apparently the only way to present a writer was either in the Documentary form with everyone who knew them, or with an actor reading a book under a spotlight.

It so happened that the Fitzgerald project was abandoned because of copyright difficulties, and I went on to make a dramatised reconstruction of Henry Mayhew's mid-Victorian London in 1966. This was well received, and I was able to go ahead with the Colette project that year. The programme was finally shot and recorded in the autumn of 1966 and edited in the winter. Before completion in early 1967 this film became the subject of some controversy, which I do not propose to go into at this point in time. It was however a 70-minute dramatisation in which parts of Colette's work between 1900 and 1926 were brought to the screen, with actors playing parts from the novels intercut with the writer's life in stills.

Apart from this programme, Jonathan Miller dramatised the story of the Barretts of Wimpole Street in 1966, while in 1967 Don Taylor made a memorable programme on Sean O'Casey. All these programmes were made before Fred Burnley's Scott Fitzgerald programme or Colin Nears' film on Kafka. Certainly they antedate Tristram Powell's highly evocative film on Jean Rhys, perhaps the true successor to the earlier pioneers. I just thought they deserved a mention.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT KITTS

London, N.W.3.

Dubbing

SIR,—While agreeing with Borges about the evils of dubbing (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1976), there was one occasion where it was not used but a case was made for it to have been justified. Here is a quote from my review of Minnelli's *Lust for Life* (1956):

'Kirk Douglas has an uncanny resemblance to Van Gogh and he plays this most difficult role with a talent which, to me, was unexpected. But not once in a scene in which he speaks does he convince. The reason is twofold. The atrocious dialogue itself, except when it is an occasional direct quotation from Vincent's letters, and the American accent. We accept the convention that he and all the cast must, though portraying Dutch and Frenchmen, speak in English. But for once here was a justification for post-voicing. If a European actor, say Peter Lorre or Yves Montand, had been used to voice Kirk Douglas in *broken English* (assuming the dialogue well-written), then one might have come very near to accepting this Van Gogh as a recreation of the original.'—*Rotha on the Film* (Faber, pp. 192-194, 1958).

Yours faithfully,
PAUL ROTH

Thame, Oxon.

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Film Guide

**BAD NEWS BEARS, THE (CIC)

Ace-pitcher Tatum O'Neal, not easily overshadowed by the sustained capers of a no-talent boys' team desperately fighting back from the bottom during one California Little League season. (Walter Matthau, Jackie Earle Haley; director, Michael Ritchie.) *Reviewed.*

**BIG BUS, THE (CIC)

Though genuinely and often brilliantly funny, this parody of the disaster movie proves ultimately self-defeating. Other than inventing grotesque variations on the usual cataclysms and cliché characters (including cannibalistic bus drivers), it has really nowhere to go. (Joseph Bologna, Stockard Channing, Ruth Gordon; director, James Frawley.)

*BINGO LONG TRAVELLING ALL-STARS & MOTOR KINGS, THE (CIC)

A factually based, whimsically staged account of how black baseball players finally made the white leagues. Sporadically engaging, thanks to excellent performances, even though the period charm (late 30s) is spread on with a blunt trowel. (Billy Dee Williams, James Earl Jones; director, John Badham.)

**CAR WASH (CIC)

Invigorating fantasy 'musical' depicting a day in the life of an L.A. car wash. Very strong on character, comedy, continuity and direction, despite a tendency to expand running gags into obtrusive fragments of plot. (Franklyn Ajaye, Ivan Dixon; director, Michael Schultz.)

CENTRAL BAZAAR

(The Other Cinema)
A multi-sex jamboree, in which Stephen Dwoskin's talent for observing faces and poses is ground down in the service of an endless, epic grope-in, which prettily hints at depths of emotion which it never remotely approaches.

**COLIN & PLATONIDA

(The Other Cinema)
Original and curious adaptation of a Leskov story, silent and shot in super-8 mm (in striking colour) by James Scott in Galway with a cast of local actors. A haunting halfway station between Russia and Ireland, past and present, literature and cinema. (Colin O'Finneadha, Frankie Allen, Nora Halloran.)

**CONFESSIONS OF WINIFRED WAGNER, THE (Contemporary)

Nearly two hours of straight-to-camera talk by Bayreuth's former mistress, covering evenings with Hitler and views on a dozen musicians. A mesmerising experience without directorial influence, with a resilient lady who swept all evil under the carpet and still retains an impossible innocence. (Director, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.)

*COUSIN COUSINE (Curzon)

Pleasurable film from former scriptwriter Jean-Charles Tacchella, which takes a cool, ironic look at the lives and loves of two families newly united by

marriage; attractive performances, but the material is ultimately too insubstantial and the direction too loose. (Marie-Christine Barrault, Victor Lanoux, Marie-France Pisier, Guy Marchand.)

*DIARIES, NOTES AND SKETCHES (Artificial Eye)

Jonas Mekas' wild and woolly concoction of home-movie footage, awkward poetic sloganeering on behalf of New York's dispossessed Lithuanian community, and baroquely smug paeans to the early American underground. Fascinating and infuriating in its rough-hewn didacticism and primitive autobiographical approach.

**FACE TO FACE (CIC)

The psychiatrist (brilliantly played by Liv Ullmann) in Bergman's convoluted fragmentary record of mental breakdown and attempted suicide is allowed no easy recovery, but finds the beginnings of solace in the contemplation of the 'mutual love' between her crippled grandfather and her previously hated grandmother. (Erland Josephson, Gunnar Björnstrand.) *Reviewed.*

*F FOR FAKE (Essential)

Marvellous magic show contrived out of François Reichenbach footage, the sagas of Howard Hughes, Clifford Irving, Elmyr de Hory and Orson Welles, and the brilliance and humour of Welles himself at an editing table, destroying and reconstructing illusions at a breathtaking pace.

*FRONT, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Woody Allen in almost a straight role as a little man in the McCarthy era who 'fronts' as a television writer for blacklisted friends, until he has to face his conscience and the Un-American Activities Committee. Rather like a 50s teleplay itself, Martin Ritt's film is weighted with solid craft—and an a-political, humanitarian pioussness. (Zero Mostel, Michael Murphy.) *Reviewed.*

FUTUREWORLD (Brent Walker)

Media-people Peter Fonda and Blythe Danner investigate plot to dominate the world hatched at futuristic holiday camp staffed by supposedly fail-safe robots. A lacklustre sequel to the quizzical *Westworld*. (Arthur Hill, John Ryan; director, Richard T. Heffron.)

*HARVEST: 3,000 YEARS

(The Other Cinema)
Virtually a one-man job by Ethiopian Haile Gerima, this is a fresco-type political analysis of poverty and class exploitation in his homeland, taking in fantasy and allegory on the way. Despite excessive length and an over-orchestrated soundtrack, Gerima achieves some striking images and ironic juxtapositions and the opening, depicting the beginning of the daily grind, has a genuinely lyrical feel. (Non-professionals.)

**HISTORY LESSONS

(Artificial Eye)
Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's rigorous version of Brecht's novel *The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Caesar* counterposes ancient and modern Rome with a sense of layered history that perfectly matches the city's sounds and images. A landmark in materialist cinema.

INCREDIBLE SARAH, THE (CIC)

A bio-pic about the life and theatre of Sarah Bernhardt which is as dull and static as the kind of stagecraft that Bernhardt set out to change. Glenda Jackson never seems at ease, and Richard Fleischer adds to the discomfort by treating the tantrums alternately as melodrama and farce, but never with a trace of irony. (Daniel Massey, John Castle, Douglas Wilmer.)

**LAST WOMAN, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Marco Ferreri's very personal brand of physicality focuses this time on the turmoil of a phallocratic male (Gérard Depardieu in a smashing performance) living with an infant son in a French suburban wasteland—the patriarch of a family that no longer exists. Powerful and painful. (Ornella Muti, Michel Piccoli, Zouzou.)

*LINA BRAAKE (Cinegate)

Couched in comforting sentimentality, this fuzzy piece of pensioners' agit-prop (tough old lady successfully swindles the bank which seized her home) is partially redeemed by the accomplished, understated performances of veteran principals Fritz Rasp and Lina Carstens. (Director, Bernhard Sinkel.)

*MARATHON MAN (CIC)

William Goldman has adapted his weird hotch-potch of a political thriller by extending its every inconsistency and red herring, to which John Schlesinger has added a portentous stylistic overlay. The result is an odd collection of mismatched ambitions and thematic allusions. (Dustin Hoffman, Laurence Olivier, Roy Scheider, William Devane.) *Reviewed.*

**MARQUISE VON O... , DIE

(Gala)
Beautiful, painstaking adaptation of Kleist's remarkable novella, tamed somewhat to match the delicate ambiguities and ironies of Eric Rohmer's previous *Contes Moraux*. Subtle performances from Edith Clever and Edda Seppel. (Bruno Ganz, Peter Lühr.) *Reviewed.*

*MOON OVER THE ALLEY, THE (Rita Jarvis)

Curious musical from the BFI Production Board which mixes sweetness and light with hard violence in its story of Notting Hill residents fighting it out with landladies, lovers, street gangs and men from the council. By turns embarrassing and touching, the film's best asset is the hummable music by Galt MacDermot. (Director, Joseph Despins.)

NETWORK (United Artists)

Frazzled black comedy of media manipulation, which also takes some swipes at the revolutionary underground. Paddy Chayefsky's script is full of churning bile, and his satirical slams are too disgruntled to be well directed as the action escalates into way-out fantasy, with Peter Finch as a media messiah. (William Holden, Faye Dunaway, Robert Duvall; director, Sidney Lumet.)

**NUMBER TWO (The Other Cinema)

Godard's most innovative film in years, and the first to be made at his Grenoble studio. Focusing on a working-class family, often in two or more images at once, the film explores the construction and transformation of visual and verbal language with a depth that leaves the rhetoric of Godard's 'Dziga-Vertov' period far behind. (Sandrine Battistella, Pierre Oudry.)

OBSESSION (Columbia-Warner)

The *Vertigo* world revisited with a louder soundtrack (Herrmann's hysterical score includes organ and wailing choir) and plusher visuals (fantastic hazy colour and striking Panavision compositions). But unlike Hitchcock, Brian De Palma doesn't provide the hero's obsession with any moral co-ordinates, and the film rapidly becomes a tiresome stylistic exercise. (Cliff Robertson, Geneviève Bujold, John Lithgow.)

**REALM OF THE SENSES

(Pastashire)
Nagisa Oshima's powerful erotic film about the celebrated *amour fou* of Sada and Kichi in 1936. Like *Death by Hanging*, an illustration of Eisenstein's dictum that realism is 'the function of a certain form of social structure,' depicting the lovers' descent (or ascent) into total commitment with staggering mastery. (Tatsuya Fuji, Eiko Matsuda.)

RITZ, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Rita Moreno's parody of a fifth-rate Puerto Rican artiste is one of the rare moments of sustained exuberance in this sluggish farce set in a gay New York bath-house. The original cast fails to recreate the waspish tone of Terrence McNally's Broadway hit. (Jack Weston, Jerry Stiller; director, Richard Lester.)

*SEBASTIANE (Cinegate)

Intriguing but structurally flawed attempt to see the saint stuck by arrows as the victim of a tangle of male sexuality in a Roman Empire frontier post. An adventurous independent film, in which the Latin dialogue (English subtitles) is only one of the idiosyncrasies. (Leonardo Treviglio, Barney James; directors, Derek Jarman, Paul Humfress.)

SEVEN BEAUTIES

(Columbia-Warner)
Though hailed by American critics, Lina Wertmüller's seventh film is another vulgar extravaganza, with lots of outré angles and looming close-ups, in which black farce and concentration camp horrors are injudiciously combined. (Giancarlo Giannini, Fernando Rey.)

SILENT MOVIE (Fox-Rank)

Working on his usual assumption that nothing succeeds like excess, Mel Brooks almost ruins his fetching notion of a silent movie about the making of a silent movie by sheer overloading—there are ingratiating appearances by Hollywood notables, unfunny clowning by Marty Feldman and Dom DeLuise and an abundance of wild, unrelated gags.

**SPIDER'S STRATAGEM, THE

(Artificial Eye)
Ingenious adaptation of Borges' 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero', and arguably Bertolucci's best film—curiously arriving here six years late. Gorgeous colour and virtuoso *mise en scène* recalling middle-period Welles illuminate a mysterious homecoming. (Giulio Brogi, Alida Valli.) *Reviewed.*

**STORY OF ADELE H., THE

(Hemdale)
Truffaut's intractable but grittily heroic recasting of the 'true' story of Victor Hugo's younger daughter, driven mad vainly pursuing a faithless English cavalry officer from Guernsey to Nova Scotia. Wooden performances cannot diminish the disquieting evocation of Adèle's escape from the absent Hugo's lowering presence into a passionate solipsistic fantasy. (Isabelle Adjani.)

TEXAS CHAINSAW

MASSACRE, THE (Excalibur)
Gory saga of a teenage quintet and their fatal encounter with a family of demented meat-eaters. Director Tobe Hooper piles on the agony, and a hysterical time is had by all. (Marilyn Burns, Allen Danziger, Paul A. Partain.)

**XALA (Contemporary)

Abrasive comedy from the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene, which uses its farcical plot (a businessman is unable to satisfy his newest wife in bed) for the purposes of trenchant satire, mostly at the expense of the country's bourgeoisie, blindly apeing the snobbish attitudes of their former rulers. (Thierno Leye, Seune Samb.)



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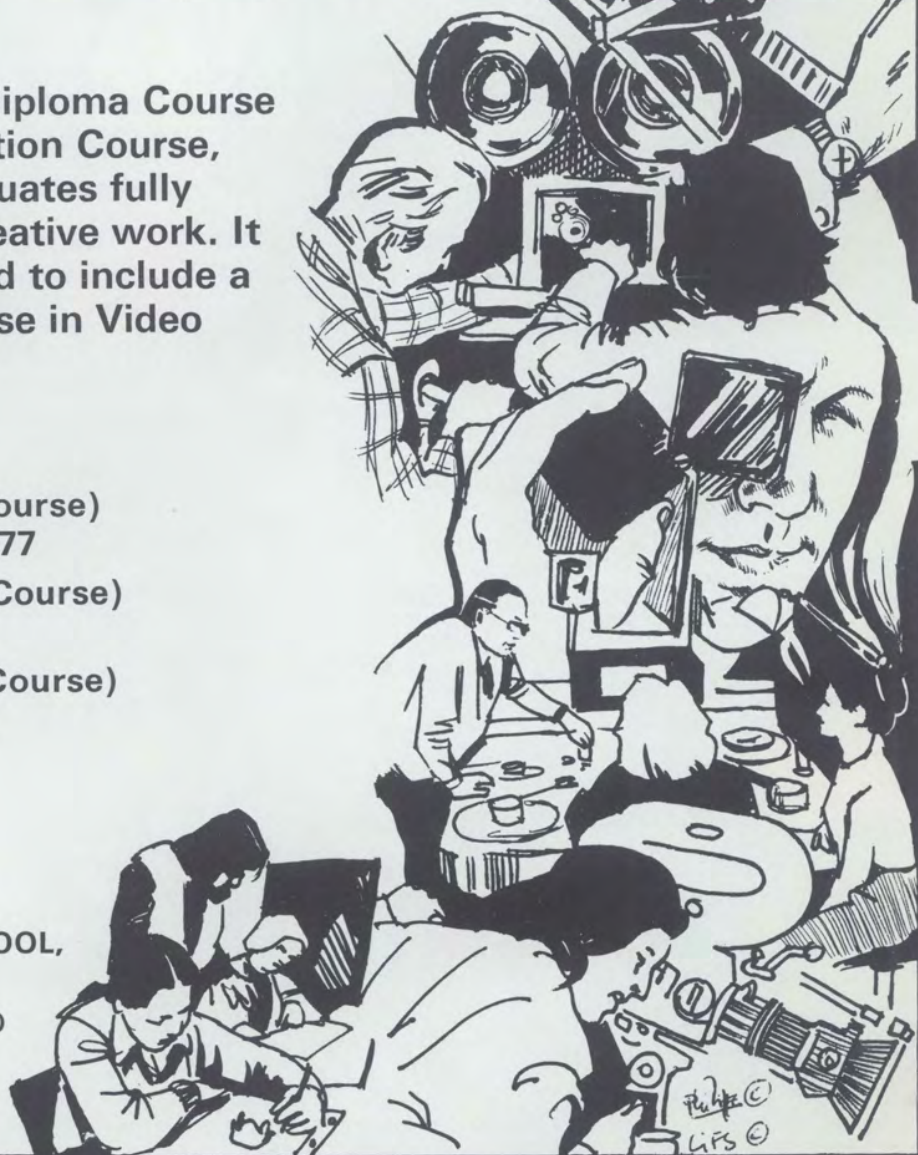
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